

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG **PCZONE.CO.UK**

PCZONE

ISSUE 188 CHRISTMAS 2007

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

CRYSIS

The first verdict of the shooter of the year
Only in PCZONE



REVIEWS SPECIAL!

Gears of War, Call of Duty 4,
Kane & Lynch - all rated inside



FAR CRY 2

On location with Ubisoft's
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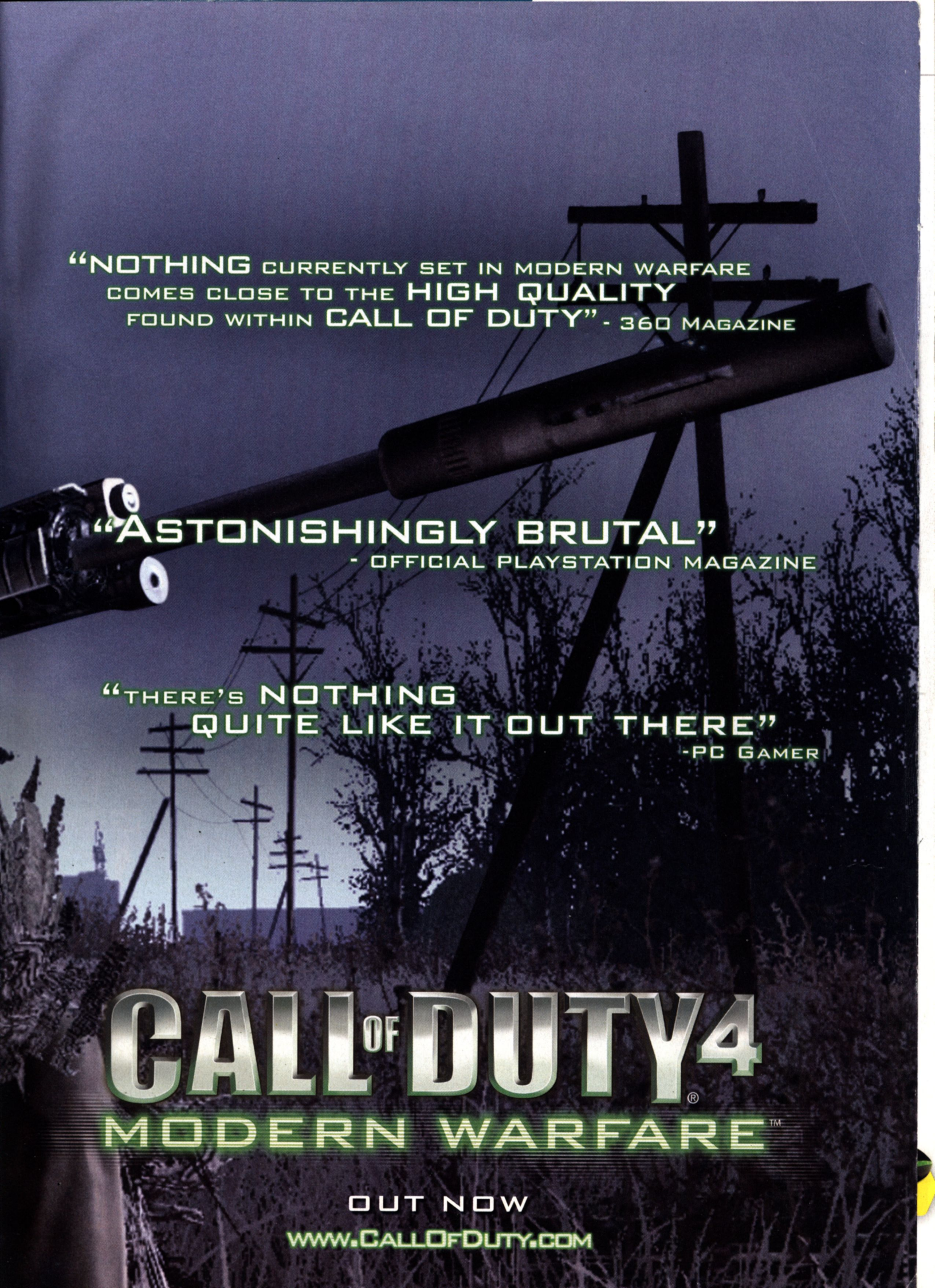
PC
DVD
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NINTENDO DS



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"NOTHING CURRENTLY SET IN MODERN WARFARE
COMES CLOSE TO THE **HIGH QUALITY**
FOUND WITHIN **CALL OF DUTY**" - 360 MAGAZINE

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Microsoft
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gamesforwindows.com/gears



Out November

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 Games for Windows **LIVE**

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COVER STORY

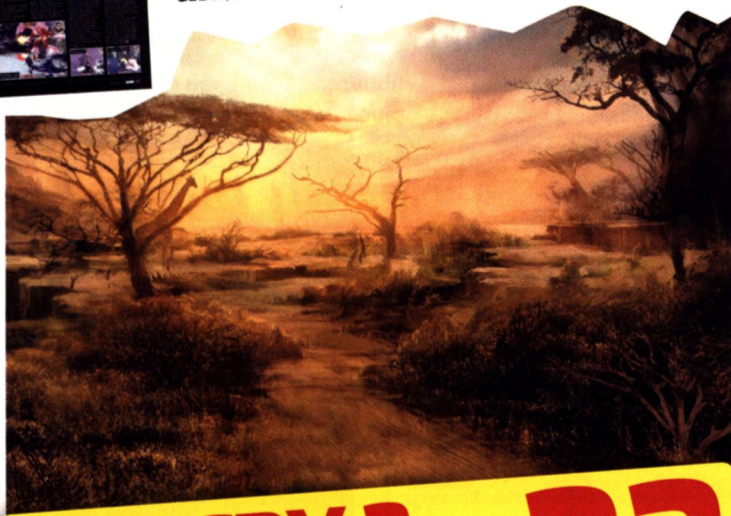
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CRYSIS

Does Crytek's frozen paradise have the brains to back up the beauty?

NEVERQUEST 127

"I'm stuck in a fantasy world and I can't even get a lawyer..."

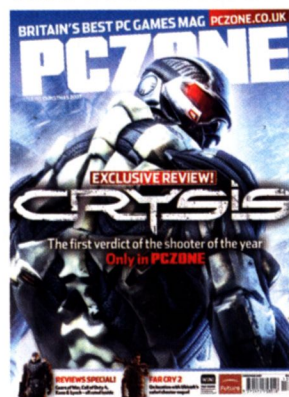


FAR CRY 2

FIRST-HAND REPORT FROM THE
UBISOFT RESEARCH TRIP TO KENYA!

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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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Too busy? PC ZONE in 56 words...
We have a chat with a nice man from Canada about antelope dung and then wonder how to spell the plural of 'oryx', before trying to work out if Koreans are better than aliens. Then Log gets delayed by monsters on the tube, Steve shoots Russians and Suze catches pedestrians in the crossfire before bugging off.



HI-DEF? MEH...

I HAD AN email this month from a unnamed games company PR person telling me that their latest release on HD-DVD was "one of the first high-definition PC games ever!" After laughing for about 10 minutes, and resisting the urge to batter them about the face and neck with a spongy mouse mat, I settled down into a prolonged fume. Everyone in console-land is still getting all hot and sweaty about hi-def gaming, when the PC has had this technology for a decade.

It annoys me that (ignorant games marketing slugs aside) the majority of the gamers out there forget the little fact that the PC has always been at the cutting-edge of graphics and gaming technology, and continues to do so. Check out our exclusive review of *Crysis* to see what I mean (page 44) – truly the first game worthy of a major PC upgrade, and with visuals far exceeding anything on so-called 'next-gen' consoles.

This month is one of the biggest PC ZONE reviews issues ever, with our definitive verdicts on *Gears of War*, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat*, *Hellgate: London*, *The Witcher* and many more, all boasting – yes! – hi-def graphics.

Oh, and give a fond farewell to our foul-mouthed reviews editor Suze Wallace when you're there too (page 43). We'll farakin' miss her...

Jamie Sefton, editor

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SEE PAGE 9
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Games for Windows

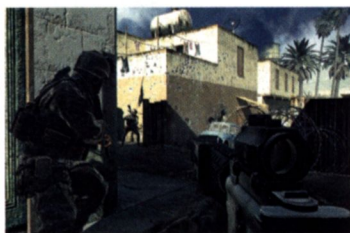
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Find out exactly why the console-kid's champion works so much better on PC...

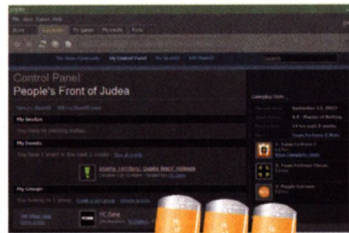
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GET INVOLVED! 120

ONLINE ZONE
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FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware
Steve Hogarty bathes in five pound notes, and showers in pennies
JELLOCAR Yeah what's wrong with it today?

MANIFOLD Fall into a wall

BEAR GO HOME

BLACK SHADES And I will always love you

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH
SUPER LETTER GAME

PREMIERE GAME OF THE MONTH

That outside

116 FREEWARE
In which Steve's low wages pays dividends in terms of his enforced ability to find fun without paying for it...

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MOVE TO MIDDLE-EARTH... OR MIDDLE-EARTH WILL MOVE TO YOU

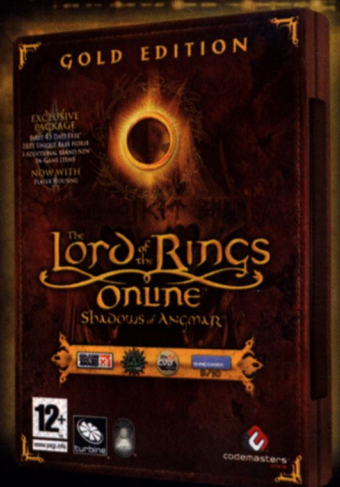
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MEET THE TEAM

For the times they are a' changing...



SUZY WALLACE

Farckin' off

AGE: 28

LIKES: Driving

DISLIKES: Slowing down

FANCIES: A change

FAVE GAME: GTR2

PLAYING NOW: Kane & Lynch: Dead Men

Suzy Wallace has left the building. At least by the time you read this she will have – right now she's using up her final days wrestling with a steering wheel and shouting obscenities at her monitor. As well as being the least-delicate of the *PC ZONE* flowers for the past four and a half years, Suze has become the most authoritative motor-sports reviewer in the industry. A fact not lost on the people who make driving games – and as such she's off to be an important person at Blimey! games, an offshoot from the team who made *GTR2*. Farckin' missing you already Suze...



STEVE HOGARTY

Man of Letters

Steve did little this month bar recount a mundane anecdote about ordering too many pizzas from the Domino's website. He sorted it all out, but it was quite a worrying time for all involved.

NOW PLAYING:

Call of Duty 4



RICHARD COSGROVE

Inner workings

A deafeningly loud hotel heating system inches above his insomniac head made Richard sleepwalk his way through a comic con. In fact, our new prod ed is napping at his desk even now.

NOW PLAYING:

System Shock 2 (yes, really)

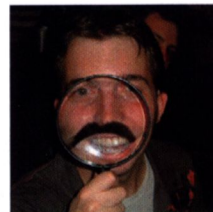


LOG

Steed

This month Log asked Richard Archer, the lead singer of Hard-Fi, to "ride him like the horse that he is". Remarkably, the talented popstrel was enthusiastic about the concept, and then rode Log like the horse that he is.

NOW PLAYING: *Gears of War*

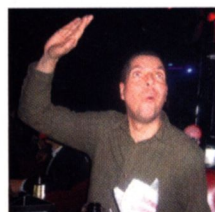


WILL PORTER

Utter hypocrite

Will recently reneged upon years of detesting the increasing corporate nature of football by quaffing oysters in a hospitality suite at an Arsenal game. He claims the champagne tasted bitter and hateful.

NOW PLAYING: *TimeShift*



JAMIE SEFTON

King don

A man whose emotions depend entirely on the performance of Leeds Utd, Sefton started off the season with a negative 15 points of happiness yet, thanks to Dennis Wise, is now mildly happy.

NOW PLAYING:

The Orange Box



PC ZONE MASCOTS

Imaginary cheerleaders

This month the gang formed an environmental protest group and chained themselves to the railings of cruel multinationals who don't reach government targets on carbon emissions. Well done superfriends!

NOW PLAYING: *Alone*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Placing other people's awards in our sweaty underwear, then licking the award and putting it back.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Bogus *WOW* beta invites, falling down stairs in Soho and those wonderful men at the Post Office

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

MEETING JOSSY OUT OF JOSSY'S GIANTS IN THE PUB	100 mins	Drunkenly promising him a free subscription to your magazine and then forgetting
ZIZZI, ASK AND PIZZA EXPRESS	55 mins	Rivals that belong to the same company? Surely there's a law against this sort of thing?
BEST REVIEWS SECTION OF ALL TIME	105 mins	Everything we've been writing about for the past two years has just touched down...
THE COLONEL	22 mins	Scary art freelancer Big John's worrying contact in the Middle East who can provide a seemingly endless parade of automatic weapon imagery
GAMES MEDIA AWARDS	132 mins	ZOMG Log was totally robbed! And other stories
HUMPING WOMEN'S LEGS WHEN DRUNK	80 mins	Someone we know humps women's legs when drunk. We're not sure he knows
THE WEIGHTED COMPANION CUBE	67 mins	We miss that little guy so much that we've even made a weighted companion shrine
4PM FOR AN ENGLAND INTERNATIONAL?	83 mins	What are we supposed to do Blatter? Drink at our bleeding desks?
THE ALLURE OF RARE WOW PETS	76 mins	Well, we haven't been back to Azeroth in a while. But some Spectral Tigers could tempt us
THE ORANGE BOX	121 mins	Games so good that we don't even feel daft for saying 'Orange Box' any more.

WIN!

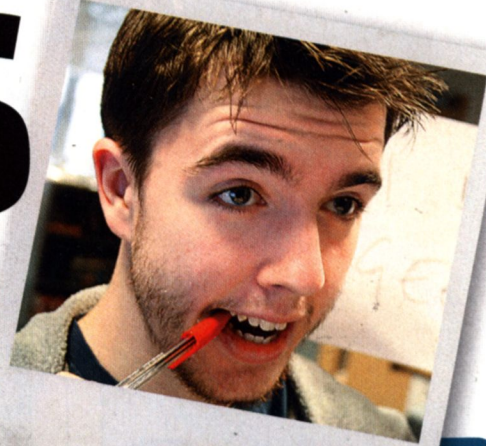
Once, Tiny Compo was guarding the sheep atop yon hill when, bored, he cried "Wolf!" and the rest of the mag woke up and raced to his aid. Lead News, Oil, Hot Shots – all of them. They were right pissed off when they found out it was a joke, and when there actually was a wolf they didn't bother helping. Tiny Compo was ripped to shreds. Tiny Compo 186 was won by Kate Briggs from Towcester. Send this month's answers to 'Louis Walsh is a bit smug, isn't he?', *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date – 5 Dec 2007 – will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition.

LETTERS



Steve Hogarty chuckles ruefully and writes witty retorts to our readers queries and comments



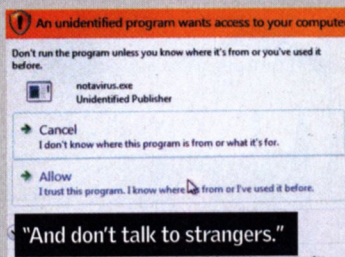
KING OF LETTERS

ILLEGAL OPERATION

I've come to the conclusion that *Vista* is a blubbing mess; an OS which is the psychological equivalent of an idiot savant with multiple personalities on a well-established road to a massive mental breakdown.

Microsoft realise they cannot 100 per cent guarantee that anything which runs on *Vista* isn't a virus, Trojan, spyware or some other vicious program that hasn't been invented yet. So the answer to all these problems is it simply doesn't run anything without the consent of the user who probably can't tell the difference between *installOverlord.exe* and *deletehardriveforalough.exe*.

Sometimes it can't even be bothered to ask you and simply doesn't run it at all. It asked me if I wanted to allow *bioshock.exe* to run after I'd double-clicked on it – and I honestly suspect the super-duper *Vista Edition* will ask for confirmation of every line of code. It also cries like a baby when I tried to log on to my Steam account. I think



it associates Steam with heat and burning and has come to the conclusion that this is bad for my PC.

What's more my wife found out her favourite game of all time, *Mahjong*, works like a treat. Bastards!

I've resolved most of the issues, apart from the Steam problem, but I get the feeling every time I install anything I'm going to go through the same painful process I used to go through in the bad old days of PC gaming, when I had to recalibrate the phase inducers and create an Anti-Time-Static-Warp-Bubble™ just to get one extra kilobyte of high memory in DOS to get a game working.

Mark Renshaw

WIN!



Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're all modern-like, fingers to keyboard. Every month, we'll reward our chosen royalty with a posh XFX GeForce 8600GT PCI-E graphics card. For more info, check out www.xfxforce.com. You can also buy one at www.dabs.com for £76 (product code PV-T84J-UDF3).

Mark, if everybody who had a problem with *Vista* could vent their anger so eloquently, a modern Renaissance would erupt among the proletariat – though we're happy enough just pointing at that stupid OS and making farting noises.

Hill: annoyingly unscathed.



MAKE HIM PAY

I was disgusted and outraged at Steve Hill's Reality Check on war, issue 186.

During the entirety of the piece, not once did Hill undergo any form of pain. He was neither broken, crushed, mashed, stomped, stabbed, shot nor detonated. I would like to complain wholeheartedly about this. Being a long-term reader I recall enjoying (almost sexually) the pictures of agony when Hill broke his collarbone in a previous Reality Check.

What with his constant injuries, his whining and a face that should be used as a punch bag, I DEMAND that you send him somewhere where he can suffer.

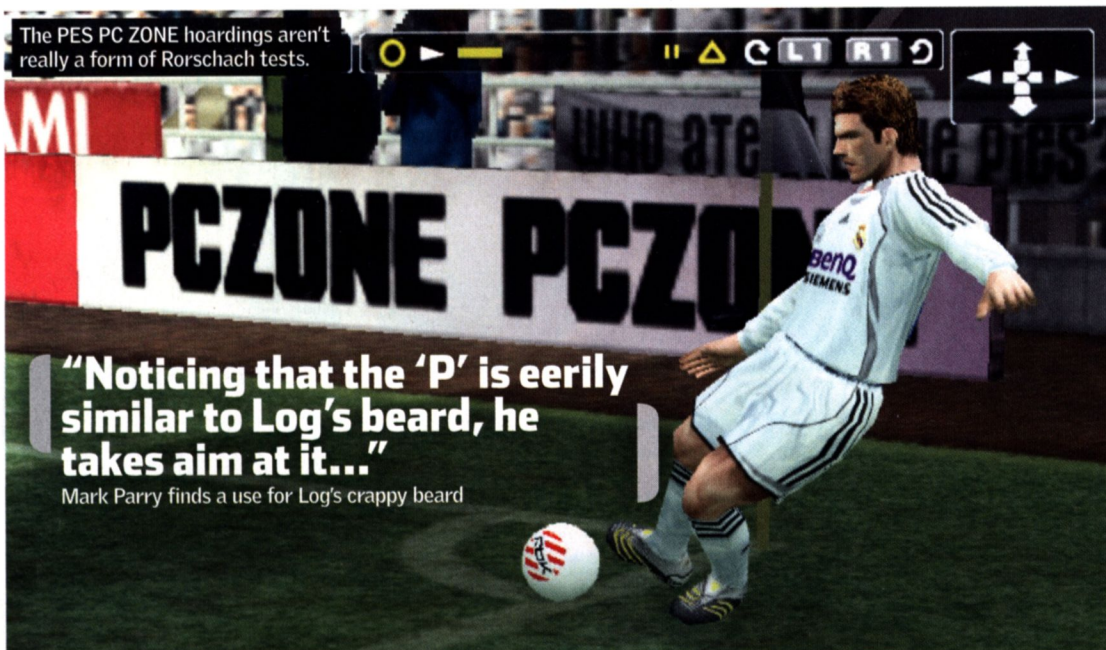
Andy Remic

These days, with health and safety regulations wrapping Steve Hill in a protective blanket of legal bubble-wrap, all we can hope to do is send him up in a plane again and watch him vomit his insides all out on the runway. Will that do?

LOG IN SPORT SHOCKER

Oh, the tension is unbearable. Liverpool lead West Ham by just a single point and the nerves are showing. It's a fairly uneventful first half, with a lot of abuse directed at the screen but it closes at none apiece. The second half starts

The PES PC ZONE hoardings aren't really a form of Rorschach tests.



"Noticing that the 'P' is eerily similar to Log's beard, he takes aim at it..."

Mark Parry finds a use for Log's crappy beard

and Liverpool are nowhere: their bottle's gone. [Letter continues with a commentary of this PES match worthy of Motson himself and ends in a dramatic penalty - Ed]

The pressure is on as Downing steps up to the spot, but then he spots an omen - the PC ZONE logo is dead behind the 'keeper in the centre of the goal! Noticing that the 'P' is eerily similar to Log's beard, he takes aim at it and smacks the ball past Green into the net! One nil and surely no way back!

Thank you PCZ for magically having your logo appear behind the goal to focus my attention when I needed it. Although I feel ambivalent regarding the subliminal appearance of Log's beard in my head at the same moment.

Mark Parry

I don't know what beard you've been looking at, Mark, but from where I'm sitting Log's beard resembles a W, just like Wario. Hmm.

INTRO SCHMINTRO

A (mildly) interesting thing happened to me the other day. I loaded *Dawn of War*, as I have many times before, but an enforced bio-break meant that I wandered back into the room as the opening scene cinematic was in full play, and despite having owned the game for years I had never actually seen it (it's actually rather nice isn't it?).

Despite the intro's prettiness I feel no compulsion to ever see it again. It made me think though: ultimately what is the

point of the fancy intro? What does it really add? They must be time-consuming to produce, and presumably for some smaller companies they put additional pressure on staff already working on the game itself. Wouldn't it be better to spend that time working on ironing out every last bug, glitch and code anomaly from the game, rather than an animated short that will be almost universally bypassed by the gaming public?

Roberto Terrazano

I suppose.

OCTOGENARIAN DELIGHT

Having owned a copy of *Prey* for over a year I now feel absolute shame in leaving it to gather dust on my 'haven't got round to playing yet' pile. What a fuckin' game!

While playing I had the settings on high and was in awe: I found it difficult to concentrate on annihilating the hunters randomly popping out of their portals to take pot shots at me while I was dangling from the ceiling, as the complexity and details I saw were just mind boggling. It's a thing of sheer terror, yet at the same time absolute beauty.



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LOKI

Sent in by Jozef Bartanus

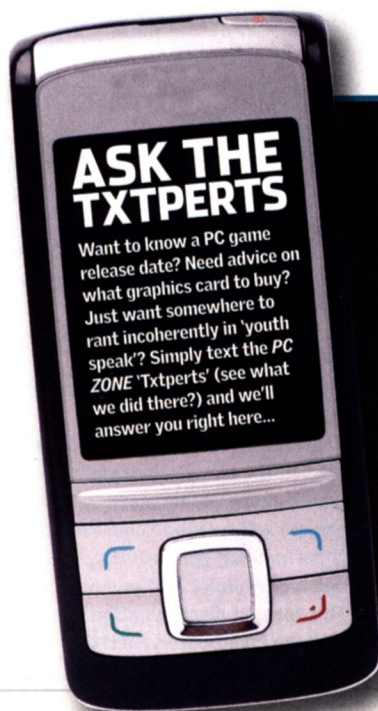
PC ZONE score: 73%

Whoever reviewed this was definitely wearing a flaming blindfold. It's just a complete piece of crap. *Titan Quest* was better in millions of different ways. In *Loki* you don't have fun - there's barely any quests compared with other mythological games. I played it for five freakin' hours before giving up - you can't say I haven't played it properly. After I played *Diablo* I nearly committed suicide, but I still enjoyed it more than I did *Loki*. A complete waste of money!

Your shout: 63%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words and a percentage score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



Any news of Storm of War: Battle of Britain yet? Ta.

Stinkpackage

It's dropped off the radar (like a plane!), most likely into early next year.

When will the release date for Left 4 Dead be on steam? Also what do u think of the mp mod 4 gta sa? Worth dl?

Dickie

Early next year for *Left 4 Dead*, and that MP mod is buggy as hell. I couldn't get it working.

Bioshock? BioCock more like! The single most bugged crashtastic game I've ever played! Why in the name of holy hell did they release it like this?

Anon

Next chance we get we'll slap Ken Levine around for you, you crazy anonymous bastard.



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Only one thing bothered me, in your review you said 'your gran wouldn't like it...' so I set out to prove you wrong. She thought it was hysterical.

True, my gran is a bit crazy but the sphinct-door had her cracking up! This gran of mine is nearly 80 – now that's impressive!

Gary McCrossan

I would've thought the elderly had grown tired of the human anus, having probably seen loads of them, but this proves that arses are funny right up until you finally die. What parts of the human anatomy have you exposed your gran to, readers?

MOD FOR IT

I would like to use your Letters page to send a big thank you to a group of people who have made my gaming experience so much richer and more enjoyable over the years: modders.



Prey – popular with gamers and pensioners alike.

In *Oblivion* I had a dog, half a ton of horse that could actually carry things, a proper longsword and black leather armour – all thanks to mods. What's more I never feel that I've got the most from a *Total War* title (sorry CA) until I've played one of the excellent modded versions. And with *Football Manager* I do not have to manually amend team names, national squads et al through the database, or personally find out what every relevant player actually looks like, because it is already done for me.

I could go on, but, once again, thank you modders everywhere for your time and effort, it is greatly appreciated.

Mandog

If you want to put knobs on your Sims, breasts on your elves, or maybe just a labium on your cat, intrepid mod teams will always be there to facilitate your frankly grotesque

fetishes (and, of course, all that stuff you mentioned too).

SHIT SUPERTEST

I really liked your Supertest about shit games, it made me laugh – especially about *Pro Cycling Manager*. I'm a cyclist but still can't stand that game! Oh, and the monosyllabic model that 'acts' in *Nina: Agent Chronicles* is Iza Czarnecka. She sounded so bad I just had to check.

Russell Baldwin

I Googled Iza Czarnecka and all I found was a photo of a chubby lady playing a piano. But this photo of the real Nina (left) made me happy.

CHEAT AINT L33T

I've recently started playing a lot of *Counter-Strike*, but there's unfortunately something that is ruining my fun: cheaters.

Every time I load up the game I see the small grey Valve anti-cheat shield and the promise that all cheaters will be banned. I used to take some satisfaction in this, assuming the shield was possibly being held by some sort of computer knight as he slew cheaters. But no knight holds that sword. I just continually see people using automatic aiming bots and there's no way to describe the hatred that I feel when I see these damnable finks getting head shot after head shot.

Why must gamers continually play games which are ruined by cheaters while they should be supposedly supported by anti-cheating programs like this or *PunkBuster*?

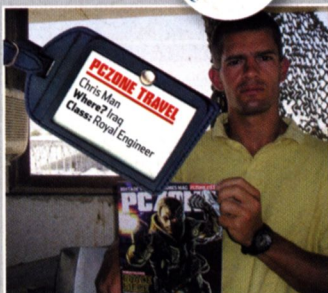
Richard Daglish

I remember when we used to play Pogs in the playground, and somebody would always come along with those cheapo self-printed Pogs. We called them 'milkie' because they were pale, and we wouldn't let them play with us. This form of discrimination went on to become *PunkBuster*. Fact! **PCZ**



For more female game characters in sexy knickers, turn to page 18.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with **PC ZONE** in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?

FIRST STRIKE

www.firststrikemod.com

The inevitable *BF2142 Star Wars* mod has disengaged Fett-like from a drifting asteroid, and rather a fancy re-skin it is too. Full report in *Freeplay* next issue.

BALDUR'S GATE

www.bioware.com/games/baldurs_gate

The office teeters on the brink of a full-on Black Isle rediscovery binge. This could be glorious...

DARK MESSIAH

www.ubisoft.com

Now being played on the normal difficulty setting, and with far less fuss. Will thanks you for your concern.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?



THIS MONTH: UKHAZARD

(AKA CHRIS ADDERLEY)

COUNTER-STRIKE

In all its forms. Have been playing this for seven and a half years now; highlights include playing against some *ZONE* staffers in person at the now-defunct TPF LAN bar.

STALKER

Must remember to go back to this game. My video card tends to run away in fear from this, and boy am I looking forward to my next upgrade cycle in February.

OLD DOS GAMES

Under a Killing Moon (Come back, Tex Murphy! Your score in *ZONE* was a resounding 92%) and *Wing Commander 4*, which has the fantastic line 'God, I love that boy's spunk' – Jason Bernard RIP.

Want to tell us what's on your hard drive? Visit the forums at www.pczone.co.uk and let rip.



Genuine Pogs – not the pale cheater's variety.

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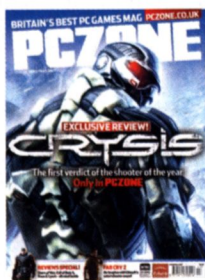
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COVER STORY

CRYISIS

It's finally here. But has the frozen, bullet-ridden beauty been worth the wait?



We all knew it would look and feel good. But just how does it all hang together? That was the question. This month **PC ZONE** proudly presents the first review of a game that'll not only justify thousands of hardware upgrades, but also lets you pick up North Korean soldiers by the neck and throw them into the sea. Crytek are trying very, very hard to entertain you – beautiful alien vistas, zero-G combat, the novel Power Struggle multiplayer and weapons as snipe-heavy as a *Far Cry* nut could ever desire. But, as ever, there has always been the chance that the hype has outrun the substance. So is *Crysis* nothing more than a tech demo or have Crytek created a masterpiece? Read on, dear friend, read on...

PAGE

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PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

I am destructor

I DID IT – I broke a mouse. I smashed that mouse into the desk until it was two half-mouses. Now I need a new mouse. I won't say what game made me break the mouse, lest it reflect badly upon the game or make my review seem at all influenced by my emotional state, but it was the game's fault.

I was completely alone in the office, and having just been shot to bits again I shouted a really bad word (an inventive pairing of two other bad words). To accompany this unheard verbal outburst, I raised the mouse about one foot above the desk and slammed it down again. I thought that the mouse would be fine – it seemed, as far as anybody could have ascertained, indestructible.

But the bottom fell off, the laser escaped and the mousewheel wouldn't spin, becoming a useless rubber nubbin. The buttons wouldn't click, and with the laser gone the entire mouse became functionless. It became a collection of arbitrarily shaped bits of plastic scattered across my desk. I had broken the mouse. My fury turned instantly to embarrassment, and then to regret.

This is the first time a game's made me break something since I lost my *Deus Ex* saved games and threw a chair at a wall, leaving a scarily big hole. And that was pretty stupid because I hadn't even gotten that far and I found the saved games the next day. I covered up the hole with a *GTA* poster, just like in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

ATTACK OF THE DRONES

Frontlines: Fuel of War destroys the world by remote control

DEVELOPER Kaos Studios PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE www.frontlinesgame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Q1 2008

IT'S A BLEAK NEAR future in *Frontlines*, but increasingly one you should be intrigued about. The Second Cold War has gone hot and erupted into armed conflict between Russia and China, versus America and Europe. The fuel and food is running out.

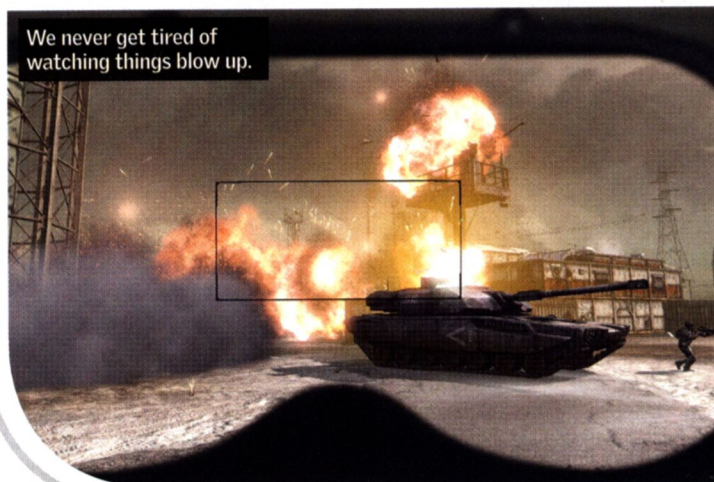
Biofuels were a liberal fantasy and solar farms too weedy to power a mathematics GCSE exam roomful of scientific calculators. It's now an oil grab between superpowers – a battle of survival of the most short-sighted. We asked senior producer Joe Kalper if he expected a Nobel Prize for raising environmental issues next year. "I'm just disappointed Al Gore stole it this time," he said with a sigh.

There are a number of good reasons to look forward to *Frontlines*. Kaos used to work with DICE on the *Battlefield* franchise, but stayed independent rather than become an EA 'super studio'. The PC game controls and looks far better than the console versions and supports double the number of online players – up to 64. Best of all, the single player story is much more than a token bot-party supplement to the main multiplayer bash and is told from the

perspective of a war journalist. He may not be a games journalist, but that's enough to get a big tick in our book. Kalper reveals that he will not only narrate the plot but also feature in some missions. As expected, brains will get into trouble and be rescued by brawn early on.

But even brawn needs some brains and *Frontlines* is becoming a very tactical shooter. In single player you'll use weapons of tomorrow, timing air-burst grenades to explode above the heads of enemy groups or setting them to timer and bouncing them off surfaces. Mission objectives branch as you push the frontline forwards and it's your choice how you advance. Drive hummers and tanks, fly gunships and jets or send out drones such as dinky rocket copters, cute buggies and robust turret tanks to do the dirty work while you cover somewhere safe with the remote. Sometimes attack becomes defence in *Call of Duty 4*-style, and you'll need to change tactics on the fly.

Multiplayer tactics pivot on an innovative character system. Your class only affects weapon load-out, but more significant is your role, which can be Ground Support, EMP Tech, Drone Tech or Air Support.



STOP PRESS!

RF ONLINE FREE

Sub-par grindfest *RF Online*, a game famed for having space elves, is now available gratis. Rejoice in the bliss of this release!

LOG IS ROBBED

Provenor of PCZ bum-references Jon Blyth single-handedly doesn't win at the Games Media Awards. Then places winner's trophy in his pants as revenge.

BIZARRE CREATIONS ACTIVISION-IFIED

We could now well get a cross-platform racer similar to the *Project Gotham* series landing on PC.

18

Special Report

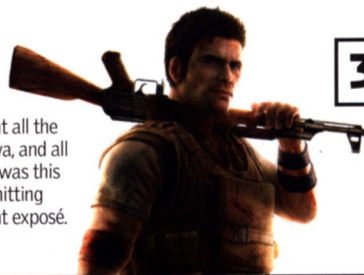
Revealing the top-heavy nature of women in games. And other hypocrisy.



22

Far Cry 2

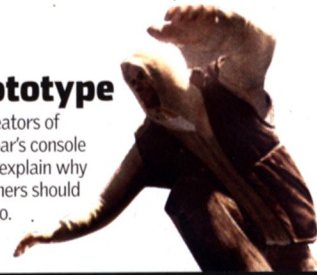
Ubisoft went all the way to Kenya, and all they got us was this lousy hard-hitting development exposé.



34

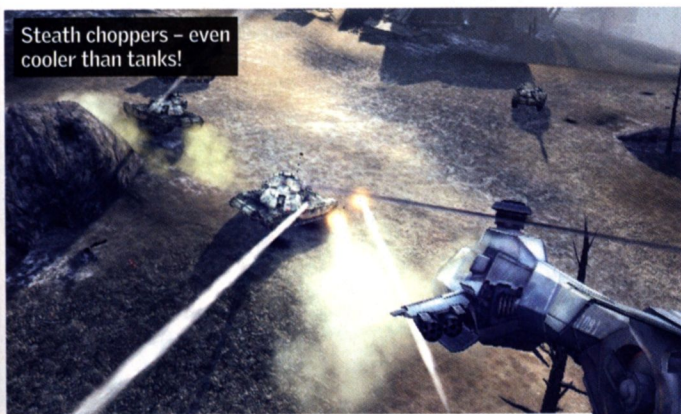
Oi! Prototype

The creators of next year's console smash explain why PC owners should care too.



Drones let you kill people using a PSP-style gadget.

Stealth choppers – even cooler than tanks!



Drive hummers and tanks, fly gunships and jets or send out drones to do the dirty work

Although there are no persistent stats carried between new games, during a single multi-map session you can build three levels for each Role through kills and repeated use. Teams will need to tactically balance EMP Tech against Drone Tech, for instance, if that seems to be where the enemy is focussing its development.

Fuel of War is showing real potential in solo and online play. It's a shame there's no co-op in story mode and there's still much to be balanced. But don't write it off as a *Battlefield* clone – *Frontlines* has its own distinct petrol aroma that could just go off big with a little more spark.

STUFF

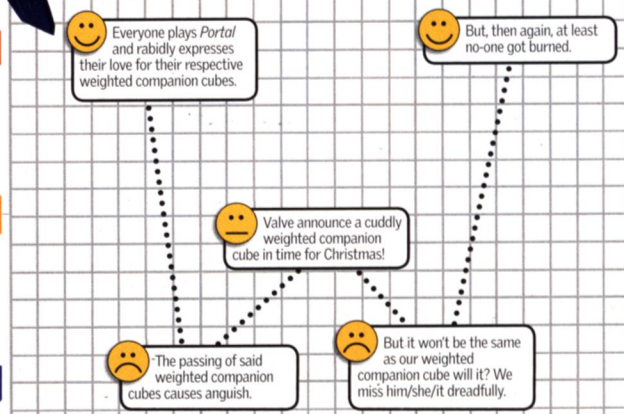
Remember the 8-bit classic *Bionic Commando* – the classic platformer starring a cyborg spy with really long arms? No, we're not too sure we do either. But the NES game is getting something of an overhaul by the chaps at GRIN – formerly developers on the PC iteration of *GRAW*. Detailing the adventures of a man/machine hybrid, it's all about swinging around, running up walls and killing people from unlikely angles.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

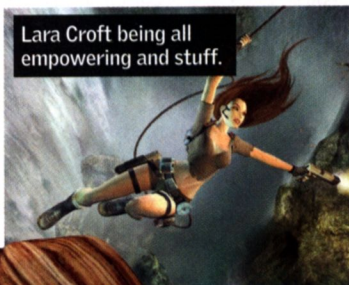


FAIR GAME FOR GIRLS



PC games are top heavy with male characters, so is the fairer sex getting a bum deal?

Lara Croft being all empowering and stuff.



Reporter
Pavel Barter

THE FEMALE OF the species is reportedly deadlier than the male. But judging by the appearance of the US Frag Dolls (the Ubisoft-sponsored female pro gamers) in a recent US PC games magazine, 'deadly' means 'clothing optional'.

In the mag's photo spread, the Dolls wear tiny hot pants, work out on exercise bikes, and say things like, "Breasts and butt only come into play as an advantageous distraction". Is it sexist? Regardless, it's a clichéd, age-old, representation of women in gaming.

"Historically, women in games were the prize or the victim," says Phaedra

Boinodiris, from WomenGamers.com. Whether it's Elexis Sinclair from *SiN: Episodes*, looking like she crawled out of an S&M club, or the chicks with Space Hopper breasts in RPGs, women in games are often sexualised to deformity.

LAZY STEREOTYPING

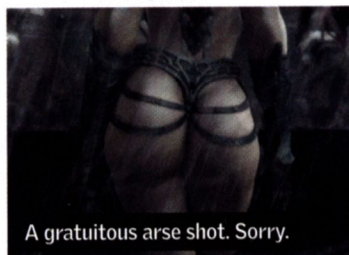
"This is laziness," says Ragnar Tørnquist, creator of *The Longest Journey* and its sequel *Dreamfall*. "It is a lot easier to create an easily digestible and titillating stereotype than a real character. Beauty is fine – I've no problem with characters being pretty – but if there's nothing inside, it feels shallow and we stop caring about them."

Some years back, US charity Children Now published a report saying that

38 per cent of the female characters in videogames are scantily clad. How they reached this conclusion is questionable, but it sounds about right. In the big shooters – *Far Cry*, *Doom 3*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Unreal Tournament*, etc – women are absent or reduced to support roles, appearing every so often to show off their lady lumps. The industry doesn't help matters much.

At game conventions, developers dress models like hookers in order to lure men toward their stands. Sex sells, it always will, but in an industry that keeps blabbing on about attracting girl gamers, isn't it time there were more realistic female characters in our PC games?

Jane Jensen, creator of the *Gabriel Knight* series and upcoming PC adventure *Gray Matter*, reckons so. "In general, people don't want characters that insult their intelligence. As women become a bigger force in the consumer



A gratuitous arse shot. Sorry.



A gratuitous bikini shot. Sorry.



Ragnar Tørnquist wants T&A in PC games to have meaning.



Leanna – the nice woman from *Dark Messiah*.



Elexis from *SiN: Episodes*: proof developers should get out more.



Games across the board will be better if they feature strong and realistic female characters...

market their choices will influence the kinds of games that are made – including gameplay interaction and puzzle types, the types and amount of story and also the characters – male and female alike.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

"If you think about it, female gamers probably have different tastes in their male characters than male gamers do. An ideal model would be like mainstream TV or film where you have characters that can appeal to both genders – sexy and smart and also be real people."

Females in games tend to be divided between ditsy bimbos and violent sluts, or scary deformed nurses that make boys say "oooh", then "ew", and then feel all confused. Lara Croft cannot go unmentioned since she's more contentious than Marmite.

"In the earlier *Tomb Raider* games, she started off as a representation of female empowerment," says Phaedra Boinodiris. "As the series grew more popular and more prolific, her image changed to become a male adolescent sexual fantasy." In *Tomb Raider III*, for example, Croft is about to take her clothes off and enter the shower when she says, coyly, "Haven't you seen enough?" OK, but what if Indiana Jones

waved his knob around on every subterranean corner?

Lara has clawed back some dignity, having received a boob reduction for *Tomb Raider: Legend* – going from a Jordan to a Jolie. "In *Anniversary* they tried to make concessions to her original fan base," adds Phaedra. Croft is tough, resourceful and bows to no man, so she should be cut some slack. There are other PC games that feature believable, often sexy, female characters that contrast to those mindless bimbos wobbling their beach balls. Most appear in adventure games.

MAKING PROGRESS

"Adventure games are more reliant on plot and character development than any other genre," explains the brilliantly named Randy Sluganski, editor of *Just Adventure* (justadventure.com). "Female characters in adventure games are more concerned with big brains than big boobs."

Randy namechecks April Ryan of *The Longest Journey* and *Dreamfall* and Kate Walker from *Syberia*, and its sequel, as the best female adventure characters yet. "Both are reluctantly thrust into a journey of self-discovery and along the way change not only their own lives,



The characterisation of *Half-Life 2*'s Alyx is a rarity in PC action games.

Girls on top

Here are four of women in PC games who aren't vapid silicon dolls.

Carla Valenti – Fahrenheit

A no-bull NYC cop. She has little personal life, but she still gets her freak on during *Fahrenheit*, before she was kicked out of the force after she stripped for *Playboy*.



She even eats donuts.



The good kind of paparazzo.

Jade – Beyond Good and Evil

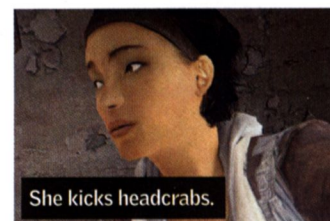
The greatest green-lipped journalist since Kermit the Frog, Jade is a dab hand at photography and likes pigs. Unlike most paparazzi we know, she lives in a lighthouse, drives a hovercraft and isn't a complete dick.

Alyx – Half-Life 2

Where would the resistance be without Ms Vance and her hacking/headcrab kicking skills? Smart, kooky and trustworthy (despite wearing a hoodie). "Is there room for two in that H.E.V. suit?" she asks Gordon cheekily. You minx.



Half lizard. All woman.



She kicks headcrabs.

April Ryan – The Longest Journey

April is a regular woman, going to college and gossiping with friends, until she finds out she's The Chosen One and that her mother is a dragon. All things considered, she takes this news pretty well.

but the lives of everyone they touch," he says.

Ragnar Tørnquist muses on the creation of April Ryan and Zoë Castillo, *Dreamfall*'s heroine. "The protagonists of both *The Longest Journey* and *Dreamfall* were always meant to be female," he says. "This was an integral element to their stories and journeys. While it'd have been possible to tell similar stories with male protagonists, their gender allowed both games to focus more naturally on communication and problem solving rather than direct action, and to have their interactions with other characters reflect this. Also, I like writing female characters. I have no idea why. I just find women fascinating."

As long as there are videogames, there will be an expectation to see brutish men shooting each other in the face. In that respect, men in games are as typecast as much as women – besotted with violence and power. Similarly, magazines like *Cosmopolitan* present a homogenised version of the perfect woman: one built to attract men. At least chicks in games kick arse. But, whatever side of the gender divide you

fall on, you can't deny that games across the board will be better if they feature strong and realistic female characters.

"Games are made by male gamers for male gamers and by engineers rather than storytellers," concludes Ragnar Tørnquist. "It's just a question of the maturity of the medium. As gamers become more demanding and ask for more complex and layered characters – male and female – I'm sure developers will step up and focus more on this area."

"I think we're already starting to see that, especially seeing as how writers are now brought onboard to do the visuals and the game mechanics justice with a solid plot, good dialogue, and interesting characters. We're getting there. It just takes time." **PCZ**

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

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*It Came From***Africa** ■ ■ ■

On their triumphant return from a recon trip to Kenya, Will Porter talks lions, elephant charges and piles of excrement with the creators of *Far Cry 2*

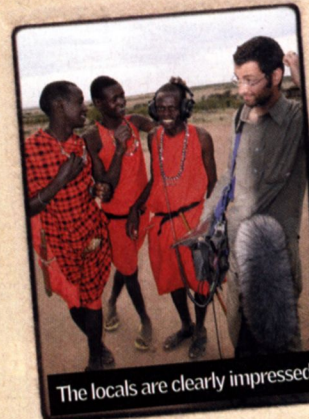
DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE farcry.uk.ubi.com ETA Q1 2008

IN MARCH 1898 TWO MANELESS Tsavo man-eating lions preyed on workers during the construction of the Ugandan railway. The pair, part of a testosterone-charged sub-species of lion local to the area, killed an estimated 135 people – their efforts later immortalised in the film *The Ghost and the Darkness*.

In late July of this year five men from Ubisoft Montreal were spending a night under canvas in the same area. "We couldn't see anything – we just heard an

elephant scream in panic about 20 feet away from camp," explains a grim-faced Alexandre Amancio, the game's artistic director. "Then we realised why he was screaming. We heard one of these Tsavo lions roar – and it was between the elephant and us. It was about 10 feet away – and the vibration of that lion roar, you just felt that in your bowels... then we heard the 'chk chk' of our two guards cocking their AK47s and we just started running to the land cruiser."

When Ubisoft claim that they will go to any ends to ensure *Far Cry 2* looks, feels and sounds like the real Africa, they seem to honestly mean it. Three weeks travelling around Kenya, sleeping with a centimetre of fabric between them and various predators, and getting to know the musky scent of their workmates at a level they never before expected. But why were they packed off to Africa in the first place? What makes the Serengeti fit *Far Cry*?



VIEW FROM THIS SIDE

The locals are clearly impressed.

VIEW FROM THIS SIDE



Alexandre (far right) poses with the gang.

"You felt the vibration of the lion's roar in your bowels."

Alexandro Amancio, artistic director

Unfortunately safari jeeps aren't charging-mad elephant proof.

Vegetarians look away now.

"Take that Rebel scum! Fnah fnah..."

"In early conception we talked about that a lot – what does 'exotic' mean?" says Clint Hocking, creative director. "What does it mean for players?"

"What we realised was that it meant somewhere beautiful, somewhere breathtakingly beautiful that required good graphics and art direction, but also somewhere people could never get to go in real life. Somewhere you know exists, but you never expected to visit as it's so remote or so hard to get to.

So we chose Africa because going back to a jungle island just wasn't going to be exotic any more after people had played the original *Far Cry*, *Just Cause*, *Boiling Point*, they watch *Lost* every week... it's not exotic any more. You've been there hundreds of times." A good point, backed up by the hundred and first return to paradise with *Crysis*...

Far Cry 2 then is creating 50km² of a fictional country in the heart of Africa – a failed



The team's Masai guide John (his English name) invited them into his home.



The facilities at Nairobi's airport weren't great.

state where the civilian population has fled or is in the process of fleeing, and warmongering leaders battle it out for control. It's certainly a game near the knuckle of current world politics.

"We didn't want to set *Far Cry 2* in a real country for a couple of reasons, one being that we didn't want the player to go to a real country then not have it be a country by the time the game ships, or something crazy like that!" continues Hocking. "A more important reason is that Africa is a huge continent and it has a massive amount of ecological and geological diversity. What was important to us was to capture the whole range of these – we want to have Serengeti-style grassland, savannah plains, central African Congo-style jungle, north African sandy desert; all the different ecosystems you see over the continent."

So it was then that camera operators, sound technicians and artists

were despatched to Kenya and parts of Tanzania – stable countries judged to have the most diverse locations on offer. To the Serengeti plain, the Masai Mara to its north with its typical savannah grassland and hundreds upon thousands upon millions of animals. The team touched down on Kenyan soil during the migration of the wildebeest – with three or four million of them on the move – only a fraction of which, unfortunately, will be making their presence known in the final game. Sleeping in tents, staying for two to three days in various different parks before moving on – it was hard work, as well as an adventure.

SHOOTING WILDLIFE

"We were super busy," picks up Alexandre. "We'd wake up at 5am, eat really quickly then hop into the land cruiser and go out on a scouting run. We brought cameras, and took about



The gun fights ruined the romance.



Red sky at night, developer's take flight.

seven gigs worth of pictures. Our days were spent just rolling on dusty trails, seeing animals and going from place to place taking photos."

With a cameraman dispatched into the skies in a hot air balloon with a hi-def camera getting them all manner of birds-eye shots of the landscape, the aim was to get up close and personal with a slice of raw Africa.

They experienced a near collision with a giraffe which, Alexandre reflects, "was so large that it looked like it was running in slow motion", and at another point an elephant decided to charge their vehicle with little to no warning.

"All these incidents we came across in Africa we're integrating into some of the conversations that the NPCs have," adds Alexandre as an aside. "When you go into a town or meet NPCs in the game world, or when they meet each other and have conversations, some of the dialogue will be stuff that happened to us in Africa."

It was a dangerous business, though, no luxury tourist lodges for the Ubisoft boys. "We managed to ask for special permission because usually you can't travel at night in national parks, and some areas you really can't go off-road, you just have to stick to the main roads. But we had special permission."

Really? I asked. Where do you get permission for something like that?

"Er..." comes the artistic director's response, coupled with background whispers and a few giggles. "Erm... we got permission by... well, you see,

Sleeping in tents, staying for days in various parks – it was hard work as well as an adventure

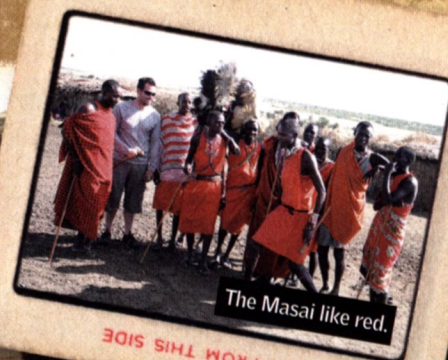
African heat

Ubisoft are the gods of hell-fire. And they bring you...

Fire is a huge component of *Far Cry 2* – it spreads, it licks, it reduces parched trees to charred sticks in double-quick time. As well as adding a new element of danger in gunfights though, seen in-game it's genuinely beautiful. On their trip to Kenya the Ubisoft boys doubted they'd come across any flames without playing with matches, but in fact they came across four separate bush fires. "The last one was actually metres away from our tent!" explains Alexandre. "We couldn't fall asleep on the last night as the camp was filled with smoke because we were downwind, then it started raining and it was put out – but we had people purposefully staying awake to keep an eye out in case we had to evacuate camp." Lucky they made it back alive really, isn't it?

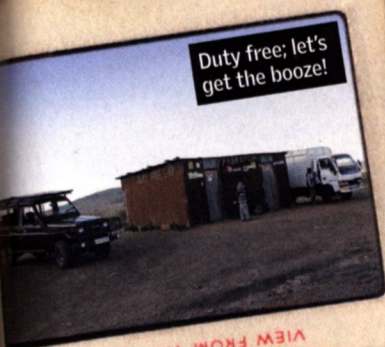


Who left the grill on?



The Masai like red.

VIEW FROM THIS SIDE



Duty free; let's get the booze!

VIEW FROM THIS SIDE



"And we'll put a warlord's base right... there."

explains Alexandre. "It's something you put in your ears but it's capturing sound using the shape of your ear. It actually positions sound in 3D. It's impressive – when you put headphones on and listen to it, it just feels real. Like you're actually there – in your mind the sound is there in 3D." In fact, if you want to have a listen yourself, it's worth hitting the *Far Cry 2* blog (blog.ubi.com/farcry2) as the team plan to upload some of their binaural treats in the near future.

After all their adventures with scary animals with big teeth, though, it is a minor disappointment to discover that the Africa of *Far Cry 2* will feature far less of its usual circle of life. There won't be any predators – we're not talking about a game with a *STALKER*-esque living, breathing ecosystem. All the large animals in the game will be grazing herbivores,

featuring star turns from zebras, wildebeest, gazelle, buffalo, impalas, oryx and the like. And, no, I wasn't over sure what an oryx was either, but Wikipedia informs that it's a gazelle with a face that looks a little like a badger.

PREDATOR-FREE

"The reason we decided to stay away from predators was because our animal AI is a subset of our human AI," explains Hocking when confronted by the lack of big cat diaries.

"They really live in the world;



they do 'special' permits you need to 'purchase' from different people. At the airport, at the park... the driver..."

Oh, that sort of permission...

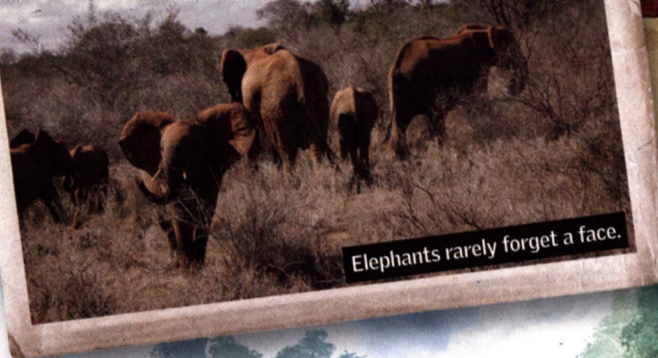
Of course, the team wasn't only after the look of Africa – they went to find out what it sounded like too. In fact, when the game appears in the first quarter of next year, the ambient sounds you'll hear will be those recorded by super soundman Amaury

on location: whether it be on the savannah, in the jungle or beneath the twittering dawn chorus. In fact, great efforts were put into capturing the birdsong of different areas at different times of day. The technology used to capture audio mood is quite clever too – known as the art of binaural recording to those in the know.

"It looks like something a doctor would use – like a stethoscope,"



Every possible nuance of their African experience was poured into the game engine



Elephants rarely forget a face.

Lushness is a feature of *Far Cry 2*.



Hang-gliders: ditched by *Crysis*, embraced by *Far Cry 2*.

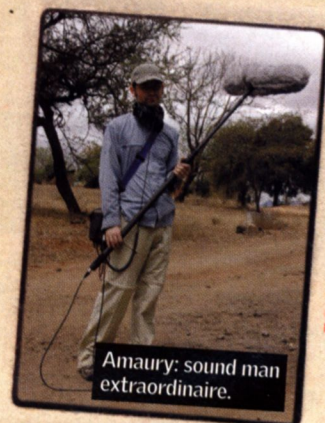
in the morning, for example, gazelle will come up from the flatlands into terrain that's hillier to find a watering hole. In these groups of 20 or 30 they'll come in, find a watering hole, drink, move back out into flatter lands where they can see out over the plains and then graze there. They live in the world

following these rules. The problem was, if we wanted to put predators into that ecosystem we would have to balance it to make sure the lions didn't eat all the gazelles and then all starve to death."

With so much being put into the AI patterns and routines of the human enemies, the extra work demanded by

the kings of the jungle was deemed unnecessary. Gazelle will act as if there are predators around but, as in real life, really, you won't catch a glimpse of them.

After the gallant expedition had returned to Montreal, they had about two weeks to polish the hell out of the game demo that was due to be placed lovingly before the critical eyes of the press, yours truly included, at the annual Leipzig gaming jamboree. It was a frenzied two weeks by any account, as every possible nuance of their African experience was poured into the game engine. The shape of the terrain, the types of rocks, the placement of trees, the shape of the hills, the texture of the ground and its colour: everything changed to some degree to prompt, even at this early stage, the fullest African experience possible.



Amaury: sound man extraordinaire.

VIEW FROM THIS SIDE

With *Crysis* (reviewed on page 44) seemingly content to retread what is essentially the *Far Cry* template, it's genuinely gratifying to see Ubisoft's *Far Cry 2* keeping what made the original so special, yet also trying to innovate wherever possible.

With a true go-anywhere mentality, the fact that this is distinctively a PC game rather than watered down console fare and the all-important presence of a hang-glider, this is a game leading the charge of a new, exciting breed of shooter. And, as we all now know, it's authentic too. But do you know what the biggest change that was heralded by the Ubisoft fact-finding mission? Shit.

"The first thing we noticed when we set foot in the African savannah is that it's filled with shit," says an earnest Alexandre. "There's seriously all shapes and all sizes. We have to include it – it's just the first thing that you notice!"

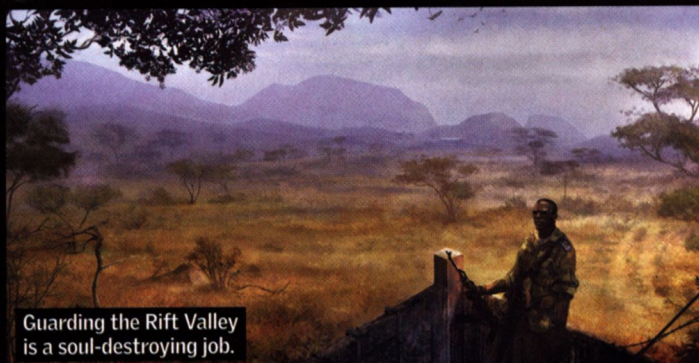
So there you go. *Far Cry 2* – set to be packed with only the most authentic of excrement. A gaming first if ever there was one. **PCZ**

Good company

Making friends and influencing people on the dusty, arid plain

You don't play as Jack Carver in *Far Cry 2*. No, he and his loud hawaiian shirts have been mysteriously ditched. Instead you choose from twelve or so characters as the game starts. After you've taken your pick of the feisty bunch, the rest are released into the wilds and you'll come across them all as you play through the game.

Help them out and befriend them and they'll come in useful later on in the game should they be in the same area, perhaps picking up your battered body and nursing you back to health after you come off worse in a gunfight with enemies. Should they die, you'll be able to cradle their bodies as they pass on, while the weather tunes itself to rain and thunder to add to the drama. Intriguing stuff, to say the least...



Guarding the Rift Valley is a soul-destroying job.



STEVE
THE GREAT LEADER
OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF STEVE



MONTY
CEO, CFO, CCO, COO,
BOARD DIRECTOR OF MONTYLAND (INC.)



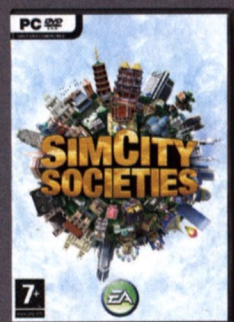
MARGARET
CREATOR, FOUNDER,
HEAD BOHEMIAN OF MARGARETOPIA

WHAT SORT OF SOCIETY DO YOU WANT TO CREATE?

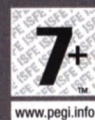
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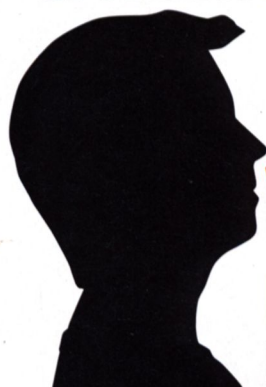
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WILL PORTER PRESENTS

THIS MONTH: PLUS ÇA CHANGE...

WE WERE TALKING about the old chestnut of 'best moments in games' the other day (not exactly a stone that's particularly unturned in these pages) but it got me thinking about just how many of my favourite bits in games had me doing pretty much nothing at all. Sifting through the apartment of my dead brother in *Deus Ex*, building a squadron of Orcas in the original *C&C*, poking around in cupboards in *Oblivion*, experimentally knocking dead bodies around with the crowbar in *Half-Life 2*, writing my name in bullets on nearby walls in any shooter that takes my fancy...

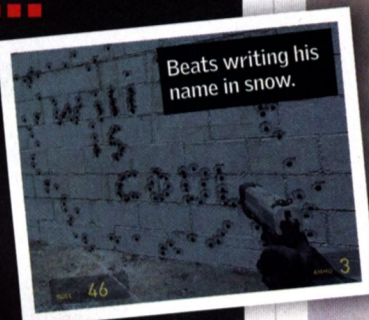
Of course, if any enemy grunts were passing on patrol they'd see me intently studying lichen on some fallen boulders or jumping up and down on the spot to see if I could see over the edge of the map – and they'd probably think me quite mad before automatically saying something like "Hey!", "Get him!" or "You're gonna die!". But I just like being granted a little 'me' time – the world may be in imminent peril, but that doesn't mean I can't crawl underneath a table while NPC friends are discussing battle plans and refusing to come out.

I think this is why I just hate games that are relentless: all push, push, push with no time for quiet reflection. I don't mind games that seem relentless – *Call of Duty* games, for example – but at least they give you a spot of time to hide behind a bombed out building to have a good think about just how relentless everything is.

Pacing is simply vital to a good game – peaks and troughs of action are vital to retaining attention. The games that assume we've all got a five-second memory span and fill our screens with the same carbon-copy action again and again, like *Clive Barker's Jericho*, always end up listless and redundant.

I am a gamer, not a goldfish.

I just hate games that are relentless: push, push, push with no time for quiet reflection



F-15E Strike Eagle

"So can I shoot it or not?"



BLUE SKY THINKING

Clancy gingerly holds on to his magic feather, shuts his eyes and unveils *Air Combat* www.ubisoft.com | ETA: 2008

HAS ANYONE ACTUALLY seen Tom Clancy recently? We're getting increasingly worried that he's lying in state somewhere, while Fidel Castro-esque announcements like this are pumped out to the media to reassure us that all is well and good in the world of military videogaming. And now Clancy has taken to the skies! Is this truly the brand unfettered in its undying opportunities?

Made by the same bunch who create the *Blazing Angels* games (the Romanian branch of the Ubi-gang) and apparently having borrowed the *GRAV* HUD lock, stock and missile barrel, we have to admit to being a touch mystified. A stirring rendition of future conflict

with an arsenal of 60 planes with a "focus on realism, accuracy and details" it may well be – but it looks like an LSD trip in a burning fireworks factory.

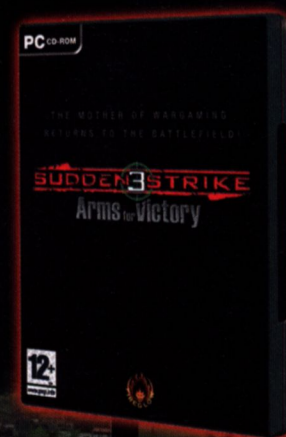
Still, with the traditional PC preserve of the flight sim occupying only the deepest end of hardcore gamers, there may well be space for Clancy's (OK, his people's) latest venture. If the PC flight sim isn't sacred, then what in God's good name is?

The meat of *Blazing Angels'* gameplay certainly suits the near-future setting, even if we could probably have done without all the blue outlines, diamond-shaped markers and talking heads in the corner of the screen.

BACK TO ARMS!

SUDDEN³ STRIKE

Arms for Victory



Naval unit support



Gigantic maps



Detailed 3-D graphics



Easy-to-control interface



Multiple air units



PC
CD
ROM

suddenstrike.com

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Dear Log,

Just noticed another example of what a feeble-minded twat you are on your Steam page. Having fun dicking about as a namby-pamby Medic, are you? Bit of passive healing is it? You spineless shit. I hate you so much. I'm actually going to shoot you. In the game.

Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

Oh, lie down and get shit on, Steve. You're the first to bitch when your big burly HW guy doesn't get to go über. And what's that class you want to have sex with... the Engineer? Hardly the best example of hands-on first person shooting, is it? Go to the same old places, build some robotic heappost and hide with your penis tucked between your legs? I'm going to pretend my hypo is full of piss and rain pizzle drizzle on your back. In the game.

Log

Dear Log,

Of course you don't like the Engineer - it's the most technical class in the game. You could sellotape your left mouse button down and it'd do the same job as a Medic. To be a good Engineer you have to be resourceful and quick, and intelligent, and knowledgeable, and a bit more sophisticated than some moron who runs around spraying health on people just so he can feel like he's helping. Yeah, you're helping, but everybody's laughing at you behind your back.

Steve

Steve,

Hold on a minute. We both know that *Team Fortress 2* is a game of balance and teamwork. And we both know I'm utterly shit at online shooters, and love *TF2* mainly because it gives me retard classes that I can play. Why are we pretending to fight when I've übercharged your Heavy? Oh yeah, it's because you're being a dick about how complicated the Engineer is, when it's just a matter of knowing where to put shit. Go finger a peacock, you big brown stripe.

Log

Log,

No, you're a big brown stripe. For me, *TF2* is essentially just another means of criticising the choices you make and the person you are - and all to hide my own petty insecurities. Look at my stats; I've played Medic longer than you yet I seem to think it appropriate to belittle you in this public forum. Help me, Log, I have serious mental problems.

Steve

Steve,

I love you, Steve - we can get through this.

Log



It could look a bit like the 360's *Battlefield: Bad Company*.

BATTLEFIELD 3?

Info pipe burst, details leaked all over the web

snipurl.com/1s1hy | ETA: Q4 2008 (allegedly)

FIRST SUPPOSED DETAILS of the drooled-for *Battlefield 3* have supposedly crept on to the supposed internet via a leaked PDF meant for EA investors. It details a modern online shooter touting **80 players battling on a choice of eight maps**.

A release date of late 2008 is mentioned, along with a possible public beta next summer and an announcement in January. With two playable armies, NATO, the Middle Eastern Coalition and the same five playable classes, it doesn't seem to be a massive departure from *Battlefield 2* - but the

cheeky PDF also teases with talk of MMO-styled characters and avatars. The game will run on a DirectX 10 version of the Frostbite engine, the engine in which the console versions of *Battlefield* run.

So basically it's an extensive overhauling of what's still regarded by many as the best online shooter around. Sounds mundane enough to be true, we reckon, although we had our bets placed firmly on a *1942* remake. EA says "no comment" but with a twinge of guilt, as if they've some sort of sequel to hide.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE: PAYBACK

It's not really *Soldier of Fortune*, you know

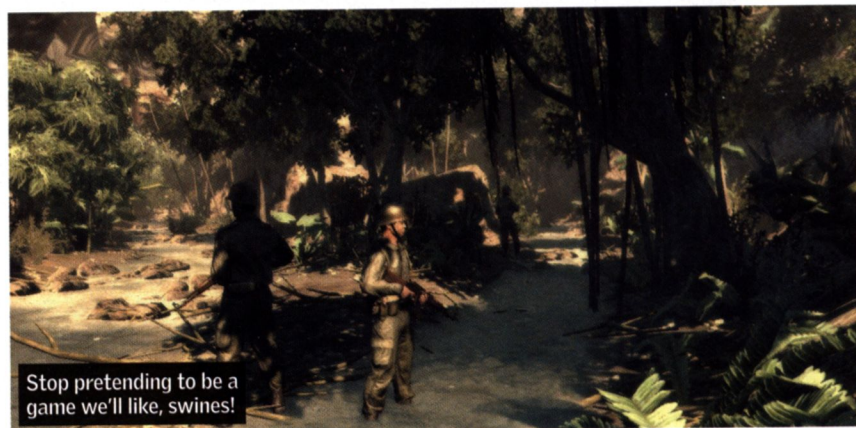
www.sofpayback.com | ETA: November

WE WERE LITERALLY interested to hear that *Soldier of Fortune: Payback* would be touching down in November, and the accompanying media made it look 'not half bad'.

But according to the flagrant arm flapping of one Will Porter, it's not worth the pixels that it's displayed on. Our deputy editor describes the developers, Cauldron, as the "guys who made that *Knights of the*

Temple II game," before swinging his arms around in a mechanical fashion making whooshing noises. Now it doesn't sound very good.

So just as a heads-up to anybody who doesn't have the sage advice of Will Porter continually floating about the office, don't rush out and buy this just because it's got the same name as a great game. It's fairly likely to be bums.



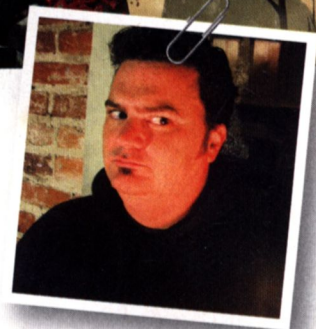
Stop pretending to be a game we'll like, swines!



Eddie Riggs – roadie and Satan ass-kicker.



Don't mess with the power of ROCK!



TIM GAVE ROCK AND ROLL TO YOU

Will Porter sees the *Psychonauts* supremo unveil the power of rock in *Brütal Legend*

www.doublefine.com | ETA: TBC

TIM SCHAFER IS a hero of mine. So when I sat in on one of his first *Brütal Legend* presentations alongside five or six sullen businessmen (each of whom was wondering how much cash this stout, hoodie-wearing lunatic could make them), I was clinging to his leg and weeping happy tears. I had finally met the man behind Purple Tentacle.

The game is not as yet confirmed for PC, but we had to mention a new project from a man who has for so long been a by-word for underappreciated greatness on our home platform. "A lot of this is inspired by my own teenage years where it was nothing but heavy metal," explained Schafer, a man for

whom the words 'wide-eyed' and 'exuberant' could be coined for. "Ozzy, Maiden, Sabbath – those have a place in my heart." Surrounded by album covers plastered with volcanoes, blood, skulls and women dressed only in neon lights, he described his devil-horn brandishing hero: "You take on the role of Eddie Riggs, a roadie for a heavy

metal band. He's just a normal guy, but he's got a cursed belt buckle." A roadie sucked into a world where the oppressed locals are in dire need of salvation by the power of rock – it's up to Eddie to form an army of rockers to take on 'the man'. "You can tour the whole continent and feel its crazy beat, volcanoes spewing chrome, rivers of blood and everything that's cool from these albums," adds Schafer pointing wildly around the room before describing Eddie's

axe-wielding abilities and earthquake-summoning power chords.

A typical situation in *Brütal Legend* might see you outside a mine filled with slaves who dig up rock memorabilia with repeated bangs of the head. Free them and they'll be recruited into your army for future missions. This may sound insane, but this is Schafer – a master at creating fully rounded comic characters. And this time one to be voiced by Jack Black, no less.

Schafer's Double Fine may well have found a formula here that's not only within their original kooky range, but also one that the mainstream will want to buy into. For those about to rock – we salute you.



"Don't tell me – you're into Death Metal."

**TRAITOR &
PSYCHOPATH**

18

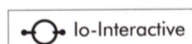




KANE & LYNCH

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UPFRONT **OI! WHAT'S YOUR GAME?**



OI! **MAX!** WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

Steve Hogarty talks *Prototype* with producer
Max Belanger of Radical Entertainment

Who are ya?

NAME Max Belanger

POSITION Producer

AGE 31

**GAMES WORKED
ON BEFORE** *Splinter*

Cell: Chaos Theory,
Battlefield 2 and
its expansions

FAVOURITE GAMES

Half-Life, *Counter-Strike*, Tom Clancy's
Rainbow 6, *Battlefield*, *1942* and
Battlefield 2

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Splinter Cell*



Q So why are so many game characters wearing hoodies these days?

A Well, we wanted attire that suited the character's personality, and even though our goal is to create the darkest anti-hero in videogames, we want a character that will appeal to the people playing our games. *Prototype* is set in Manhattan in 2008, and what does our audience wear in New York City? They wear hoodies, and trendy clothes. It also serves the story intentions too, as Alex (the main character) is concealing his identity. There's a mystery around him, and Alex has to unravel his own story to find out who he is.

Can you tell us about the story?

It's Manhattan 2008, and you're in the middle of a huge conspiracy 40 years in the making. As you walk the streets of New York, you'll try to find out what happened to you, who you are and how you got these powers. It also turns into a revenge story, as you find out who your main opponents are.

The name *Prototype* is inspired by genetics, biology and medicine – those are some of the themes we played with in creating the story, and when you tie that into the mutant creatures we've shown, people can join the dots.

The game's animation is amazingly fluid. How did you make it work?

First off, I have to give kudos to our tech department! Radical uses its own

proprietary animation system, the Titanium Engine, which is at its fifth iteration now, and this had essentially been developed in past games. So in *The Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* we had something quite similar, and with *Prototype* we've built on top of that.

Now the system is incredibly fluid, making it really easy to navigate the world – just run forward and sprint and you can run up any vertical surface – you've got immense control over the character.

I think it's one of the key strengths of our franchise, and our studio.

We've seen some amazing unscripted scenes, with the character sprinting down streets being chased by the military, while interacting with crowds and traffic. Do you know how brilliant that is?

That was one of our goals. One of the reasons why we set the game in New York is because it's a famous city that people know, most of the time without ever having been there. People just have an idea of what it should look and feel like.

The reason New York works for us so well in terms of gameplay is because *Prototype*'s not meant to be set in a desert because it needs a populated area for the consume and disguise mechanics to work. We want the player to be able to consume anybody he meets and disguise himself as them.

New York also lends itself to these high-octane, unscripted moments that I



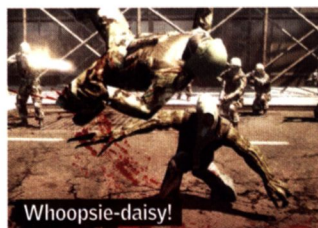
Talk to the CLAW!

"Alex has to unravel his own story to find out who he is"

Kill the monster or the cop? Decisions, decisions...



The hoodie strikes back.



Whoopsie-daisy!

We've seen Alex with a concrete exoskeleton. Does he get that from absorbing the road?

Well, no, everything that the character can absorb must be organic, so only humans can be consumed. What I showed you there is one of his defensive powers.

The full body armour, although it looks like concrete, it's actually his own. Alex isn't flesh and blood like you and I, so that armour is – for lack of a better term – his skin. He's thickening his own material to create a full body shield. He won't be able to touch a carpet and turn his body into a rug material, for instance [we laugh at the mere thought].

Everything's grounded firmly in genetics, you're acquiring people's DNA and mastering your own DNA. That's what *Prototype* is about. **PC7**



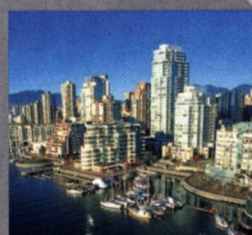
Manhattan's muggers are a tad tougher than in the UK.



"Er... sorry."

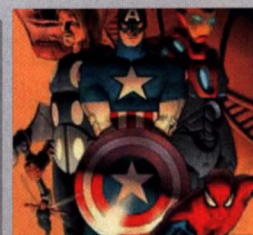
MAX BELANGER

Where he turns for inspiration...



VANCOUVER

Max urges you to go to his home town, due to its great gaming community.



COMIC BOOKS

Radical's lead designer Eric Holmes loves reading them, and writes them.



HERO

Does Max mean the Dustin Hoffman comedy? Or the Jet Li epic?

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man promising cash for kills

EDDIE GILL - CREATOR OF KILL-FOR-CASH FPS, KWARI

EVERYBODY LOVES A bit of gambling, except Christians, so why haven't we witnessed the rise and rise of online shooters in which frags means bags (of cash)? Well, it's possibly arrived with *Kwari* - a game we were honestly cynical of to begin with. Now we're prepared to put our money where our mouse is.

Q What's *Kwari* about - is it really paying people real money to play games?

A *Kwari* is an unusual shooter in that it's designed around playing for money, and because of this it has slightly different objectives. The objective is to win money as you play the game, not to win the map.

We have two core functions known as reciprocators and recurring accumulators. The reciprocator, with the benefit of hindsight, is an extremely simple function. Although you can use shooter skills typical of *Counter-Strike* or *Unreal*, you don't play *Kwari* in the same way - players have a stake in every shot.

Every single time you hit a player, in principle, you win money. Every time a player hits you, you lose money. It's a very different

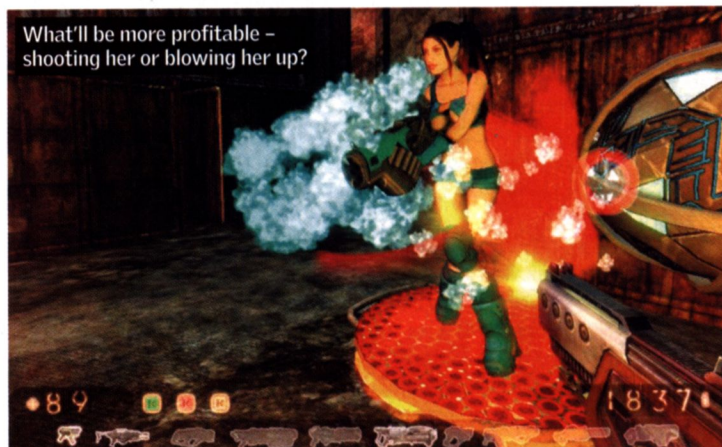
game, and you couldn't use the same tactics as with other shooters. As it's built around winning money, there are different ways of rewarding players: for example, there are jackpots every hour, every day, and every month. They could be up to \$1million.

How are the jackpots accumulated?

The recurring accumulator function is pretty groundbreaking. There are two aspects to it: collecting the money and paying it out. We collect the money through what are effectively in-game 'taxes' - if a player is burned by fire for example he'd be charged, say, one cent. There are various other traps laid throughout the game in which the players lose very, very small amounts of money - although they're avoidable with skill. To win money, players must collect a series of keys in the game.

We've got crates in the levels, and players can shoot these crates to retrieve various prizes, maybe a \$1 coin or a \$5 coin. Also within these crates are the keys necessary to win the major jackpots. It's a global financial world too, so the jackpots aren't funded by the 16 players on a map, it's accumulated across all servers.

What'll be more profitable - shooting her or blowing her up?

**So how do you - the developer - make money?**

All money paid into *Kwari* is paid back to the players. *Kwari* doesn't take a cut but we do charge for ammo, so that's almost like a pay-per-play system. Ammo is obviously necessary to win money and defend yourself in the game, so we have an ongoing revenue stream through that. You must be over 18 to play, and you can pay with PayPal or a credit card.

What about cheaters? An aimbot becomes serious if money's involved.

I'm not saying we won't have any problems, but it's pretty unlikely that we'll have the usual ones. We're using a special version of the BigWorld engine, which has a very effective data-capture system, so we have an extremely secure environment. All physics are server-side too, and wallhacks are impossible because of the way the engine works.



Wasted shots = less cash.

tat ZONE

Developers and publishers are always sending us things in a blatant attempt to make us give their games higher scores. It works most of the time, and PC ZONE Classic awards can be bought with a cleverly branded pencil, but for those times it doesn't work, we pass the tat on to you via the 'Electronic Bay'. This is an industry secret, however, so don't tell our stupid titbag readers. Hit eBay and look for our 'PCZoners' tag - that's where you'll find all this great stuff.

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity.
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



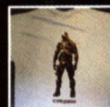
THIS MONTH'S TAT

**CRYSIS NOTEPAD AND PEN**

Hard plastic cover and probably stab-proof

**CRYSIS DOG TAGS**

So that if you die people will know you liked *Crysis* merchandise

**BAD CRYSIS T-SHIRT**

Baby blue, has a butch man on the front, words on the back

**BAD OVERLORD T-SHIRT**

Awful, green, we'd never wear it

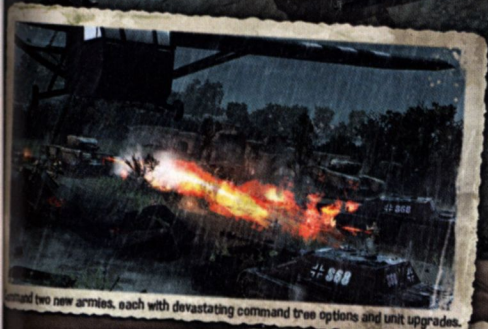
We are the fat cats, and we're sitting on our tat mats

THE TAT BOARD

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	WORLD IN CONFLICT FLUFFY HAT To answer your emails, no we didn't wash it after Log wore it. You could easily clone your own ginger beast from the DNA within.	£26.00	10
	WORLD IN CONFLICT MOUSE MAT Now one happy reader can run his mouse-hand over an image of worldwide carnage from now until eternity. Oh happy day.	£5.15	6
	WORLD IN CONFLICT BAG AND STRAP A bit of a waste of money this one - well it would have been if it weren't for charity. We'll send something nice in the package as well, if only to boost our eBay feedback rating.	£7.16	9



**SOLDIERS FOLLOW ORDERS.
HEROES FOLLOW LEADERS.**

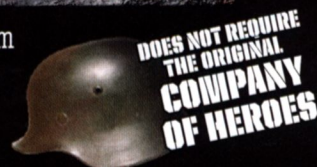
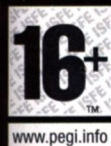


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**PCZONE
CHARTS**

- 1 **THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE**
Issue 188 38%
- 2 **ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS**
Issue 186 87%
- 3 **CSI: HARD EVIDENCE**
Issue n/a n/a
- 4 **RAIL SIMULATOR**
Issue n/a n/a
- 5 **COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS**
Issue 187 82%
- 6 **WORLD IN CONFLICT**
Issue 186 92%
- 7 **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS**
Issue 180 85%
- 8 **THE SETTLERS: RISE OF AN EMPIRE**
Issue 187 74%
- 9 **MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE**
Issue 185 83%
- 10 **FIFA 08**
Issue 188 80%
- 11 **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR - KINGDOMS**
Issue 185 90%
- 12 **BIOSHOCK**
Issue 185 96%
- 13 **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 14 **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 175 91%
- 15 **THE SIMS 2: SEASONS**
Issue 181 55%
- 16 **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER**
Issue 188 81%
- 17 **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue n/a n/a
- 18 **THE SIMS 2: PETS**
Issue 176 72%
- 19 **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR ANTHOLOGY**
Issue n/a n/a
- 20 **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%

**THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE**

Right, we expected this to stick to the top of the charts like shit to the roofs of our mouths, but for two weeks running? Disappointing!

**BIOSHOCK**

Sliding down the charts with all the grace of a greased-up dolphin sliding along a lake that's been frozen, and the dolphin's having fun.

**RAIL SIMULATOR**

Who's buying this? Well somebody bought it more times than *World in Conflict*. It's about trains - are we missing something?

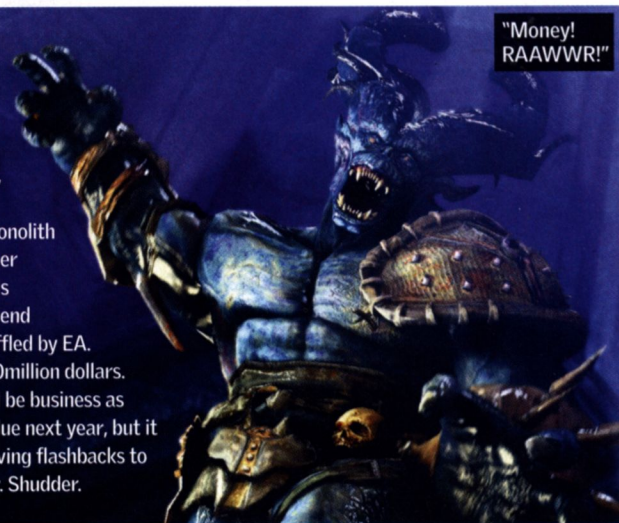
**THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**

It's rising through the charts like an intestinal worm forcing its way up your throat to burst out your mouth.

BIOWARE EATEN ALIVE

EA slyly dab residue from lips www.electronicarts.co.uk

ADDING TO THE bizarre trend of our favourite developers being absorbed into monolithic super-publishers (Lionhead into Microsoft, Irrational becoming 2K Boston, and Canberra, Monolith being embraced by Warner Brothers) the giant that is BioWare and its littler friend Pandemic have been snaffled by EA. Snaffled for a mere \$860million dollars. We're assured that it will be business as usual, with *Dragon Age* due next year, but it isn't stopping us from having flashbacks to the '95 Bullfrog takeover. Shudder.



"Money! RAAWWR!"

SIMPSONS VS HILL

NEVERQUEST

There can be only one *NeverQuest*... www.ea.com/simpsons



South Park did it first.

A TRAILER FOR the new *The Simpsons* game cropped up recently, with the titular yellow family romping around in a lively spoof of the massively multiplayer online roleplaying genre. Dragons are smited and elves are dispatched, all backed with a cinematic voiceover, ending with the portentous: "NeverQuest - only in *The Simpsons Game*." Er, and in the back of this mag

(page 127), where Steve Hill's *NeverQuest* has been spoofing MMOs for a number of years.

We broke this news to *The Simpsons Game* designer, Greg Rizzer, who replied, "No way. Are you serious? That's really funny." Presumably before meeting with some copyright lawyers.

Meanwhile, Hill is demanding a million dollars and a walk-on part on the show.

18+

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ATARI

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We make sure

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PCZONE

REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

Game Over

SSO THIS IS it: my last column. After four years of fun and games, complete with its many high points (in what other job could you drive the Spa 24-hour race in *GTR 2* and still call it work?), and also the occasional not-so-high point (goodbye horse-riding games, farewell German RTS titles!).

And while I'm still secretly proud that I'm the only woman I've met to have completed *Far Cry*, I do look forward to the day that Will informs me that the entire ZONE team got pwn3d by a girl in Fight Club (the photogenic ones whose wages are paid by publishers don't count.)

Anyway, bitching aside; what a fantastic issue to leave on: *Crysis*, *Gears of War*, *Call of Duty 4*, *Pro Evo* and more... that's three classic and seven recommended awards amongst these pages. Phew!

And so in just a few days, the murmur of the PC ZONE steering wheel will fade into silence and the air of the office will turn several shades less blue. Me? I'm off to help make driving games. So if you're playing a racing game and see me coming up behind you, make sure you get out of the bloody way.

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



44 CRYISIS

Is *Far Cry*'s descendant a rumble in the jungle or has it been lost amongst the trees?

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)
Don't shirk your duty - it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC ZONE gaming machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: www.xworksinteractive.com.



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SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
- To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

CRYISIS

DEVELOPER Crytek

PUBLISHER EA

WEBSITE www.ea.com/crysis

ETA Out now

PRICE £34.99



In a frozen bullet-ridden paradise, *Will Porter* is suited, booted and dressed to kill

WHAT MAKES A truly great action movie? It's a desperate John McClane jamming some C4 beneath a monitor and experimentally kicking it down a lift shaft on a swivel chair. It's Indy telling Sallah "I don't know, I'm making this up as I go" before instinctively tearing after a Nazi truck.

It's all about a hero living on his wits, making life or death decisions on the fly and the world hinging on his actions. *Crysis* encapsulates this, it thrives on putting the onus on you to create your own brand of action and adventure in its stunningly beautiful locations. You and the game can haphazardly create moments of such

achievement, a game worth upgrading for and something for us to treasure – but it certainly isn't perfect. Still, we've had some good times...

POWER UP

Suddenly caught in flagrante slap-bang in the middle of a dirt track without my stylish Predator-esque cloak, a passing jeep with a rear-mounted machine gun begins to take advantage of my predicament. Leaping behind a nearby sturdy palm tree, I pause to gather my thoughts – but that gunner keeps gunning. Suddenly the trunk of my sanctuary splinters, and I sit there paralysed by a bizarre mixture of fear and delight as the tree in front of me slowly and inexorably begins to tilt, then fall – leaving me staring down a delighted Korean's gun barrel with nothing but my imminent death in mind. I scream with joy.

I just have so many of these excitably expressed war stories I could regale you with. Times when equal measures of my stupidity, cunning and luck coalesced into 100 per cent proof fun. Like picking up a carelessly discarded outboard motor, turning on my super-strength and bouncing it off the head of an angry Korean soldier – only to watch it

Crysis is an astounding achievement... something for us to treasure

gaming brilliance that often you pretty much have to stand up and applaud.

What makes a decent, but unremarkable, action movie? It's heroes outrunning climactic explosions. It's an over-reliance on special effect brouhaha that rides roughshod over any of this vital spark of humanity. Sadly, the final act of *Crysis* encapsulates this too. *Crysis* is an astounding

AT A GLANCE...

You're a power-suited badass, and you're cavorting in the most graphically and physically lush environment ever seen in PC gaming. Bring on the Koreans! And, to a lesser extent, the aliens!

Minimum system requirements: 2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 256 MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0).


HOW IT STACKS

CRYISIS **92%**

CALL OF DUTY 4 **89%**

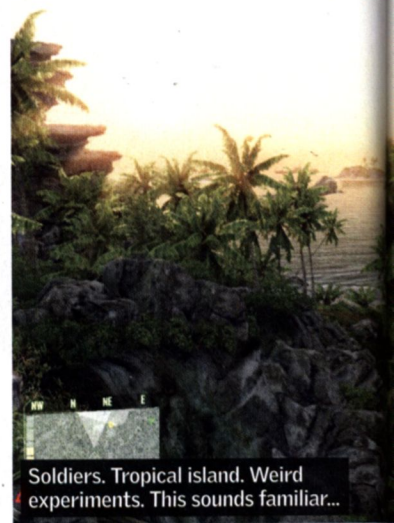
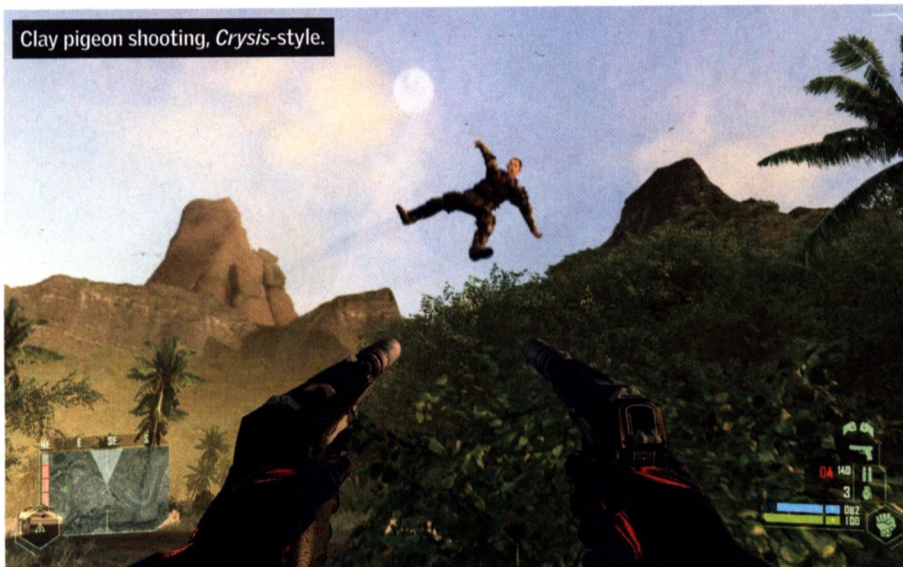
STALKER **85%**





Crysis thrives on putting the onus on you to create your own brand of action and adventure in its beautiful locations

Clay pigeon shooting, *Crysis*-style.



Soldiers. Tropical island. Weird experiments. This sounds familiar...

Big alien squids drop off smaller alien squids. They're metallic and unfriendly.



All brilliant moments of FPS fun seemingly coming out of nothing at all.

SLIGHT RETURN

What surprised me most when playing *Crysis* though, was just how similar it is to *Far Cry* (a similarity no doubt aided and abetted by the fact that a fair amount of what Crytek intended for *Crysis* appears to have hit the wayside – see box opposite). As the game stands though, this is no bad thing: this is a rebuilt, more powerful *Far Cry* for the new generation of hardware. Many of its levels are even rethought variations on what went before – notably one map with a heavily fortified base perched on a rock outcrop in the middle of a valley that apes *Far Cry*'s third level without a care in the world. It's a condensed version (I smelt the roses on the way and clocked in at around 11 hours) with some remarkable new features replacing the duff interior sections – and an almighty few shifts in gear two-thirds of the way through intent on keeping you hooked until the end. Something that certainly wasn't the case with *Far Cry*, a game that only myself and the sadomasochists that live next door ever fought through.

That's not to say that *Crysis* is forgiving though; to kick off with it seems mercilessly hard. For the first three hours, amid the giggles, the going is extremely tough – with you seemingly permanently cowering behind small lumps of rock while Korean bullets try

bounce over a large rock and accidentally crush his best mate as a bonus.

Or jumping into a jeep, wondering what the hell to do with the guy manning the machine gun in the seat behind me – then ploughing into a shed, colliding with the struts holding it up, causing the roof collapse and leaping out just as everything went up in a fireball.

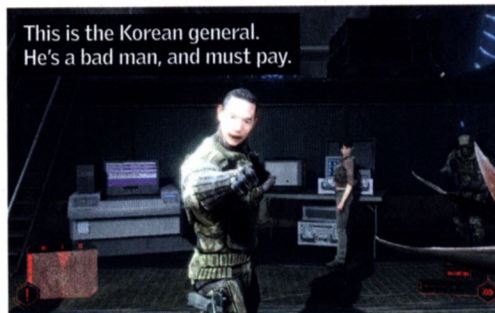
Or with my dying breath tossing a grenade into a sniper's watchtower at that perfect angle and seeing it collapse perfectly in on itself and crumple to the ground.

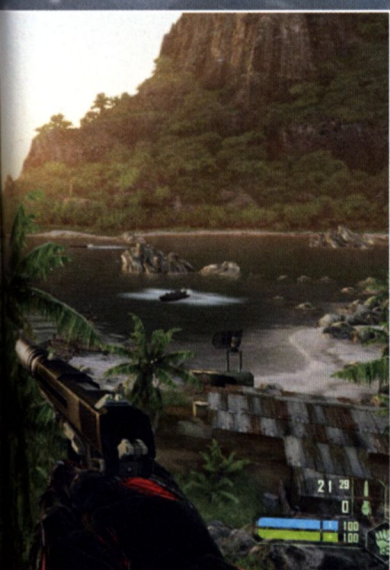
Or sneaking up behind two patrolling soldiers while cloaked, grabbing the rear end one then pelting off into the undergrowth with the sole intention of bouncing him off a rock and into the sea.

Tank crossing.



This is the Korean general. He's a bad man, and must pay.





"Could someone please tell me how to take a piss in this suit?"



helicopter. Strength, meanwhile, is the most fun (yet least used) power – letting you leap onto roofs, punch through the walls of wooden structures and, yes, even punch jeeps. As for speed – well that does what it says on the nanotin.

GO-GO GADGET

How does your average action burst play out then? Take the seaside village you infiltrate/invade on a rescue mission early in the game. As an eager and over-exuberant conscript my initial policy was to charge in with a van and run some people over, steal a rocket launcher, make some holes in my surroundings, take a ponderous moment to select super-strength, murder a Korean man with a shopping trolley and then end up cowering inside a



Here comes the cavalry.



This is a rebuilt, more powerful Far Cry for the new generation of hardware

Missing in action

Actual contents may differ from those advertised

Sadly, there's a whole ton of stuff that's been written in previous *PC ZONES* that hasn't made it into the final *Crysis*. Parachuting in to the point of your choice before meeting up with the rest of the team? Nope. A collection of characters who could well die, and a storyline that will bind around it if it happens? Uh-uh. Tactical ammo that you can trigger when it suits you, and knock out a pilot while he's flying a helicopter? Nope. Frequent visits to your aircraft carrier base of operations between missions? Dogfights in alien spacecraft around a mothership? Blowing rotors off helicopters? No, no and thrice no. If you will fan the flames of hyperbole Crytek, at least do your best to douse them before the game comes out.



"We're not going SKIING!"



Even when throttling a desperate Korean soldier, Nomad holds his gun rock-steady.

Power Stations

Multiplayer tomfoolery goes under the knife

A major focus for Crytek has been *Crysis'* multiplayer modes – and especially its Power Struggle game that's packaged in alongside the usual deathmatch. The result is a complicated mixture that'll no doubt snare devotees admiring its excellent teamplay, but is perhaps a little too daunting when compared to the ease of *Team Fortress 2* or the friendly mission system of *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. Essentially two teams duke it out for control over a factory that pumps out some supremely destructive nukes capable of wiping the enemy's HQ off the map, more kills means more cash to splash on weapons and hardware, and a whole bunch of vehicle factories and alien remains to snag and open up new technology for your chaps to buy. This is an excellent game to play with a bunch who know exactly what they're doing – but it's unlikely to capture hearts and minds outside of a hardcore audience.

It all started with a nice drive in the countryside.



The rubbish "flying a plane" level.



nearby JCB's scoop as 20 or so extremely angry orientals converged on my position.

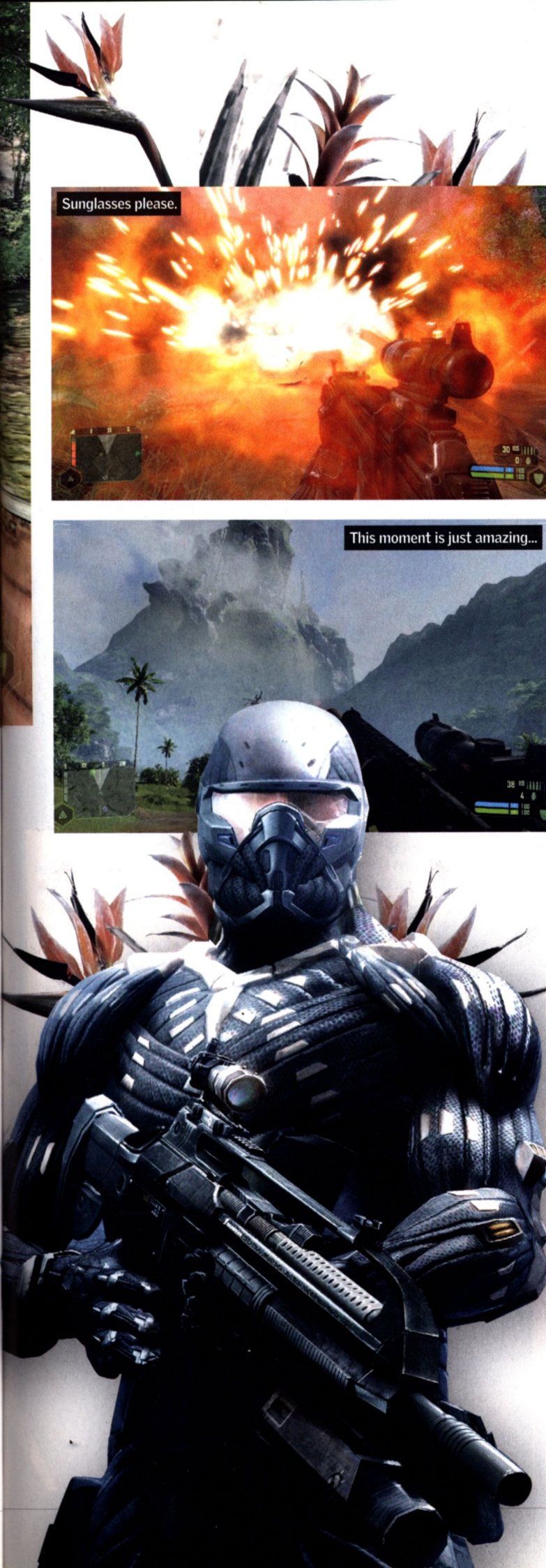
Now, having completed the game and become a nanosuit veteran, that all seems faintly embarrassing – as if I've seen a picture of myself in 1993 with my hair in curtains and wearing a lumberjack shirt. You see, after completing the game you feel

compelled to return to these old haunts and, if you'll forgive the phrase, pwn them. Really put in a bit of showboating. Returning to this mission I tagged all in sight with my binocs, stuck a silencer on my pistol, dabbled with the firing modes on my rifle, unthinkingly cloaked myself, moved myself from cover to cover, snuck past the sentries and began to take out the red menace from within. Every time they caught sight of me I'd slip into speed mode and dart around a corner, sit still to recharge my power batteries and then become invisible again only to reappear somewhere they'd never suspect.

On a first play of *Crysis* you feel that the odds are entirely stacked against you, but the deeper you go, you become increasingly aware that despite the challenge, you do have the facility to start toying with enemies like a cat constantly releasing, then recapturing a half-dead rodent.

The deeper you go you become increasingly aware that you do have the facility to start toying with your enemies

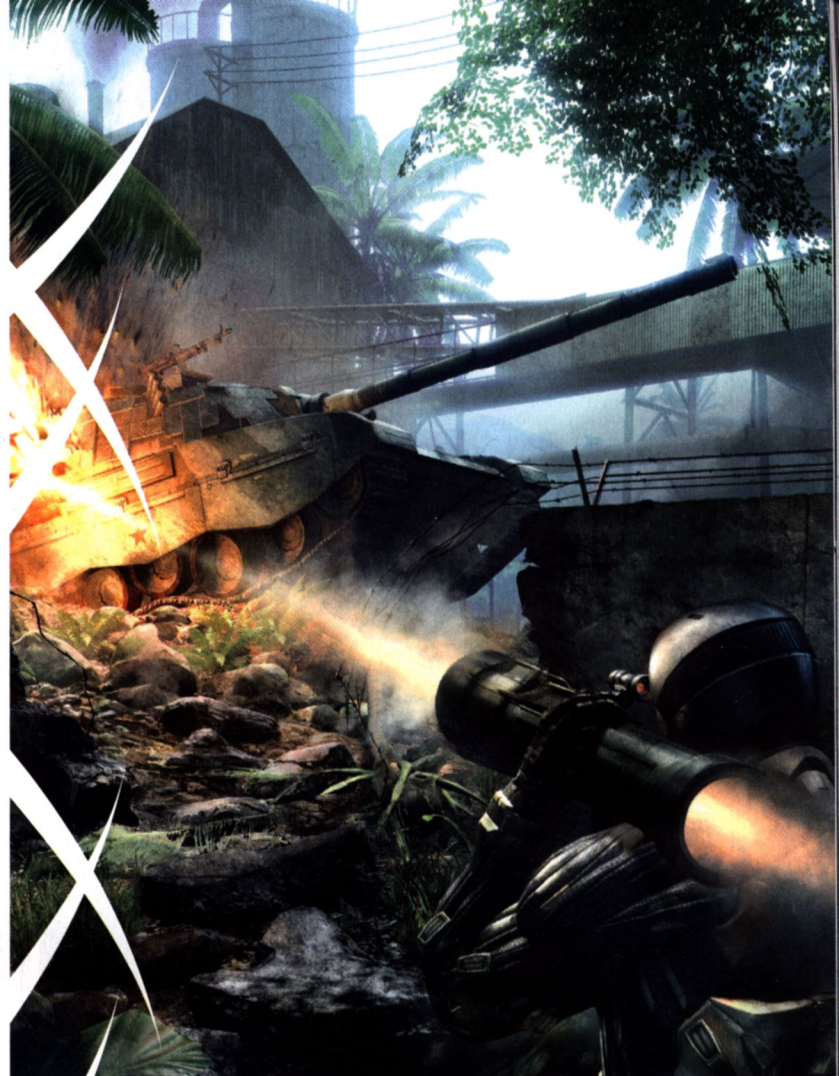
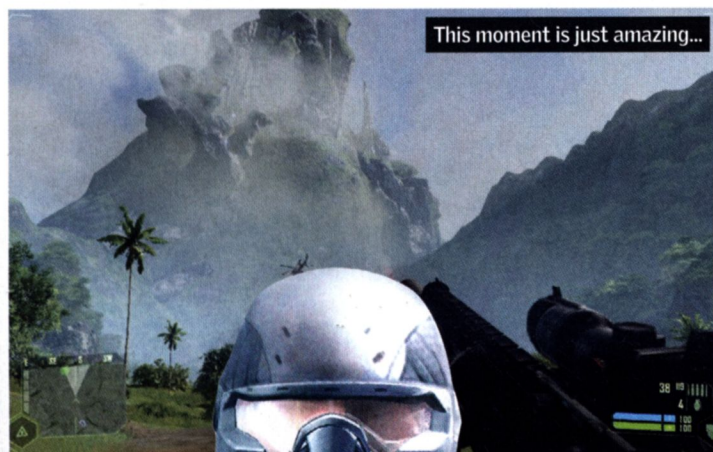




Sunglasses please.



This moment is just amazing...



Supermarket trolleys get everywhere these days.



Obviously, at some point you will always bring the high explosives out to play and start instigating trolley death, but the Korean sections of *Crysis* make it the most replayable shooter I've ever played. And as for the feeling of having two final bad guys running after you in a freshly decimated base, having unlimited breathing space to concoct inventive deaths for the poor souls is a paramount joy.

As you move from seaside restaurant, to fortified village, to military base and onwards to shipyards and mortar-pocked harbours I'd be lying if issues did not arise. Enemy AI is either very good or absolutely pig stupid – and very little lies in between. Grunts manning vehicle machine guns are lost as to what to do when you're close by, while those on gun emplacements are often oblivious to World War III breaking out a

couple of metres behind them. Every now and then you come across a soldier who just clearly doesn't know what he's supposed to be doing (but then again if a six foot man in a grey muscle suit had just decloaked near me and was about to reach for my throat – well I guess I'd look a bit dazed too).

Something that really surprised me though was that the vehicles just aren't as much fun to use as they were in *Far Cry*. This is presumably because *Crysis*' vehicles have been designed with its 'CS meets *Battlefield*' Power Struggle mode in mind (see box left) – and the added realism and more cumbersome handling that this brings just lessens the feelings of freedom and fun. Compared to the sheer delight of charging down a river taking out



But will it work? The run-down on whether *Crysis* does the business on your PC

Using *Windows XP*, *Crysis* will run on anything above a 2.8GHz processor, with a gig of RAM and a 256MB graphics card. *Vista* is obviously a mite fussier and demands a 3.2GHz processor and 1.5GB RAM. So essentially, a computer bought at top spec within the past two or three years will be able to run it (we're talking anything upwards and including a NVIDIA GeForce 6800 GT card or a ATI Radeon 9800 Pro) and, fingers crossed, get the same kind of look as *Far Cry* running at its highest setting. You still won't be getting the best of it though, as it really should be seen in all its glory – but don't get too flustered if you missed out on the bells and whistles provided by DirectX 10.

The recommended rig is to have an Intel Core 2 DUO running at 2.2GHz or anything beyond an AMD Athlon 64 X2 4400, 2GB of RAM and a something equivalent to an NVIDIA GeForce 8800 GTS/640. So nab the demo, see how it plays and if necessary, get raiding that piggy bank.



Above is DX9 *Crysis*. Below is the DX10 version – more plants and more light rays.

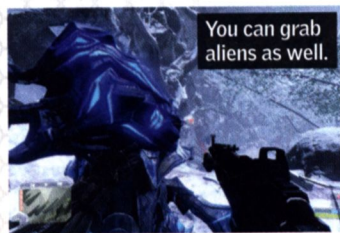


"I'll get that chicken-killing bastard!"

multiple helicopters with your ultra-maneuvrable speedboat in *Far Cry*, doing something similar with a big old dinghy in *Crysis* just isn't as thrilling. I mean, what's even the point of being given the option to sit in the back seat of a jeep when on a solo mission?

The Koreans aren't just here bullying local archaeologists and building military installations for shits and giggles though they're here to dabble with forces that they cannot begin to comprehend.

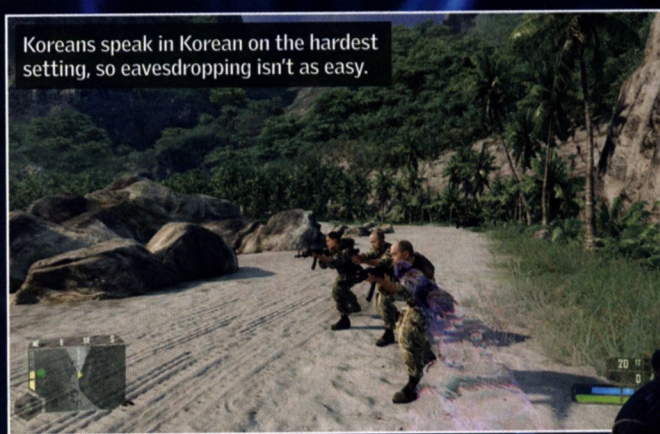
As premises go, it's a faintly familiar yet excellent one, but don't start expecting any narrative cleverness or characters who do much beyond move the plot from one stage to the next. *Crysis* is the anti-*BioShock* – and never pretends to be anything else. I mean, one of your fellow squadmates is an English chap called Psycho (who's sadly no relation to Stuart Pearce) whose dialogue contains



You can grab aliens as well.



Time to find a rocket launcher methinks.



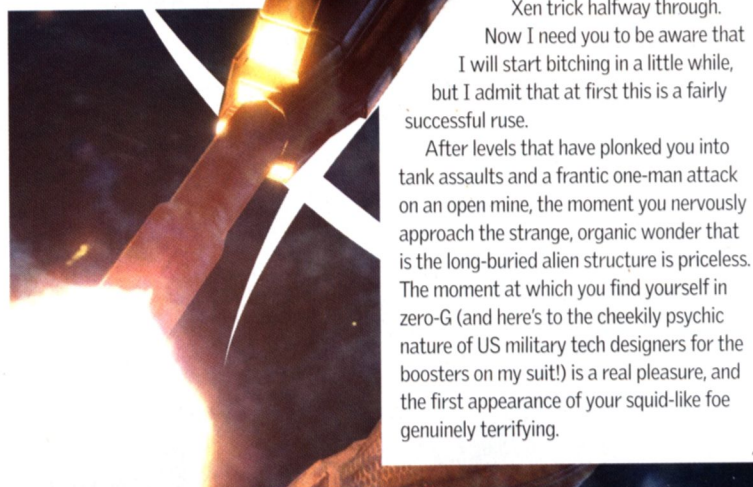
Koreans speak in Korean on the hardest setting, so eavesdropping isn't as easy.

more 'wanker's, 'bloody's, 'fuck's and 'bollocks' than are edited out of the average episode of *Jeremy Kyle*.

To be fair though, this never really becomes a major issue – mainly because Crytek are far more keen on expressing their world to you through the things you see and the things you do. Like standing among a tank convoy staring up at a gigantic distant mountain and hearing the distant rumble as its insides start to churn, and huge chunks fall from it into the valley below. Or when you first meet the aliens.

PARADISE LOST

Oh yeah, the aliens. I'd almost forgotten. As I've previously mentioned, the men behind *Crysis* have built it to tease



and entice throughout – even 'gasp!' by pulling a bit of a Xen trick halfway through.

Now I need you to be aware that I will start bitching in a little while, but I admit that at first this is a fairly successful ruse.

After levels that have plonked you into tank assaults and a frantic one-man attack on an open mine, the moment you nervously approach the strange, organic wonder that is the long-buried alien structure is priceless. The moment at which you find yourself in zero-G (and here's to the cheekily psychic nature of US military tech designers for the boosters on my suit!) is a real pleasure, and the first appearance of your squid-like foe genuinely terrifying.



Scientists really should stop this sort of thing.

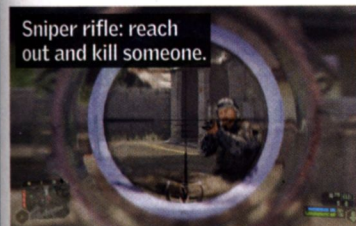


This amazing level may end in a confusing manner, but is magisterial simply because everything is so, well... alien. It's like being trapped in an ant nest, and aware of the beauty of its hive of activity but being incapable of knowing what's going on. As for the combat, well it's quite fun – but the intergalactic squids sure ain't no Koreans.

If you didn't realise that the aliens next move is to cause a little mischief with the tropical thermostat then you've been hibernating. Visually, the frozen jungle is stunning. It's here that you come across your alien friends all kitted out in their winter best, dropped off by giant flying metal kraken-beasts like a mum leaving her kids at school: humming, ice-dagger firing exoskeletons that can leap in the air and, with a neat tilt, fire themselves in your direction in a flash of spinning blades.

Thing is though, fun as it certainly is at first, after a while of this you first realise that Crytek have suddenly got you playing a different game. And that game is *Medal of*

Sniper rifle: reach out and kill someone.



Honour: Alien Assault. Everything you learnt and loved in the first half of the game becomes a sequence of ally-protection missions, sitting in the back of jeeps firing at the air-squids overhead, sitting in anti-aircraft guns and knocking even more of the threat from the sky, a truly awful level in which you pilot a craft that handles like a bin van with wings... the list goes on. I found myself sitting there wondering what exactly had happened to all the fun I used to have with my Korean friends.

Now what I'm about to say could be considered a spoiler, and it is I suppose, but it will make yours a happier playing experience if you realise that after the crappy flying level, where you end up is the last level. And yes, I realise that it will all look very familiar from stuff you've seen in the gaming press before, but this place is honestly the setting for a whole bunch of too-ing, fro-ing and disappointing boss battles that deliver little more than the initial wow factor. And as for the actual moment it ends – Jesus Christ! Forget crap *Call of Duty* endings, forget even *Far Cry* – the desultory 'here comes the sequel or, more likely, the expansion!' sequence *Crysis* ends on is an outright kick in the teeth.

BACK IN BLACK

Which makes it all the more lucky that the first thing I did having completed the game

Death of a sales hen

I found this hen next to a shop, thus the pun



CLUCK: This is my lovely hen – Kentucky. Sadly she'll be rotting in the Pacific sunshine long before the Colonel gets his hands on her.



BUK-BUK: Kentucky looks down at the ground. This proves to be the final straw and I punish her for her insolence.



BUCKAW: With super-strength that can throw a dishwasher 40 feet in the air I launch Kentucky at a wall a mere metre away.



CLU-SPLAT: Her death is swift. Lifeless feathers drift downwards. I spot one of her friends in the distance. I'll call her Nando...

was start running through my quicksaves and getting back to the free-form goodness I was revelling in but four hours earlier. Bullying the toads and moorhens I came across, causing more of those explosions that were simply to die for, rooting through people's fridges, simultaneously living on the very edge of my wits and the seat of my pants. I don't begrudge Crytek for including all that alien stuff, but it sits at such complete right angles with what has gone before that it can't help but jar. They're simply not quite as good at creating scripted action as they are action-bubble delights, and when they're so good at the latter, the fact sticks out like a sore, frozen alien thumb-appendage.

Crysis is a graphical marvel, it boasts the best application of physics I've ever come across and, in the nanosuit, a gimmick that genuinely brings something original and exciting to the table.

A long time ago I signed off a review that called *Far Cry* the beating heart of the FPS, and this is a tradition that has been held true. Despite its occasional lapse, it is a game with a taste of the future – of what can and will be done with PC gaming. Despite the bathetic bombast of its close, at its root it recognises that it's the gamer who's star of the show. Not the graphics, not the physics, not the jungle – just you stuck in the middle, making it up as you go... **PCZ**

Enemy minigunners are dumb, but powerful.



PCZONE

Graphics Sumptuous
Sound Fairly faultless
Multiplayer Amiable Power
Struggle mode

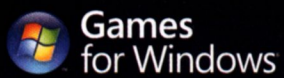
- ✓ *Far Cry* reborn
- ✓ Nanosuit is sublime
- ✓ Largely clever Koreans
- ✓ Stuff blows up good
- ✗ Poor final act

92

Paradise regained



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THAT WE'VE EVER COVERED. EVER" PC ZONE



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"I'm hard I am. Look at me as I stare into the distance in a hard way."

GEARS OF WAR

Jon Blyth closes down his higher brain functions and learns to love it

DEVELOPER Epic
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE gearsofwar.com
ETA 9 November
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The cover-based action shooter that had 360 owners weeping massive man-tears finally makes the tight-rope walk to the PC.

Minimum system requirements:
2.0GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0 support).

HOW IT STACKS

GEARS OF WAR 90%

HALO 2 60%

RESIDENT EVIL 4 57%

LET'S PRETEND, FOR the first half of the review, that no-one here has played *Gears of War*. We'll put our fingers in our ears, count backwards from 10 and allow the hype and hoop-la to drift from our ears like a beautiful smoke effect. And... you're under.

So, *Gears of War* in one word: meaty. Even the sneering lips of the heroes manage to be muscular, and the dialogue stinks of five-day sweat. The weaponry is tactile, and the sound effects are like someone slapping rashers of bacon over your ears. The gibs are stupid and make up for the desolate colour schemes of the planet. Not forgetting the stylised eruption of black blood – especially when you score a chainsaw kill – no game makes you feel like you're relentlessly punching a carcass quite as much as *Gears of War*. If you want to shoot shit and not get

your tear ducts misty over some feminine emphasis on plot and characters, hello.

But shooting stuff, as wonderful as that always is, is exactly half of what *Gears'* single-player game is about. The rest is about taking cover. Cover isn't just a useful bonus here, it's a constant fundamental – it's bound by default to the biggest button on the keyboard for a reason. You'll spend more than half the game in cover, and once you get used to the way the controls reflect that, it simply becomes the way you work.

HELMET, COLE

When your teammates get injured – one of the most irritating parts of the game – you're forced to break cover and heal them. As a device to vary the action, it's perfectly acceptable, perhaps even clever. But as a human being I resent doing most of the

killing, then getting told that if I don't heal some guy who had an AI failure and ran around beckoning bullets, it'll be game over.

On the subject of small gameplay devices, the active reload is another small but canny move. Take that bayonet gun – the last bullets make a warning click, and once it empties, a reload slider begins. Ignoring this will allow a moderate reload speed. Tapping reload at the right time can boost the speed, and hitting it spot-on will even give you a damage bonus. Try it and miss, and your weapon will briefly jam. It's simple, but when the Locust forces are advancing, it's a real pain – melee combat can kill you very quickly, especially if you don't have your chainsaw revved. When you're sniping, the damage boost can cause a headshot to take down a rocket-launching boomer in one.

SQUAD BIKE

Squad AI can always be a worry. But in *Gears*, it's good enough to make it feel like you're fighting on a team against another team. Both sides flank and charge, and you're free to take a leading role or hang around at the back. But if you do that, bear in mind that your squad will probably get hurt, forcing you forward to heal them. There's the odd gaffe – the teammate spinning around on the spot, caught between two see-sawing priorities, and the Locust who took cover from my squadmate then hid from him while staring directly through me. But I'm only saying this to show off how observant I am. They're very much

Fenix's team had a nice sideline as Rentokil exterminators.



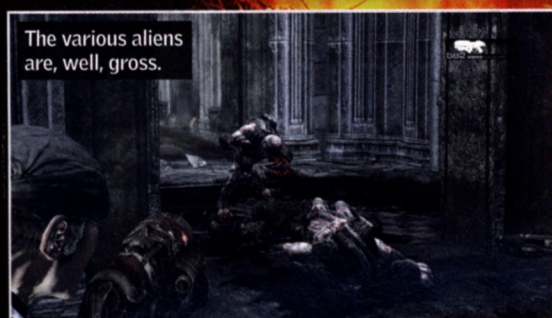


Isn't that guy from *Hellraiser*?



Shoot the alien. Not the pillar. Stupid Log.

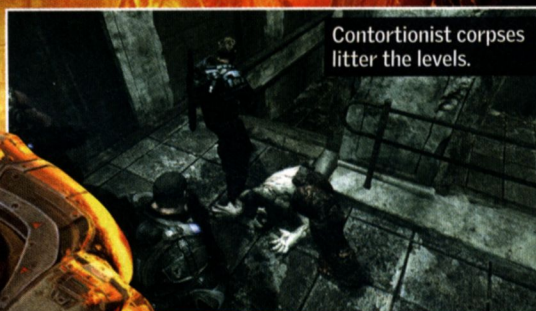
Shooting stuff is exactly half of what the *Gears*' single-player game is about



The various aliens are, well, gross.



Duck and cover is a vital part of *GOW*.



Contortionist corpses litter the levels.

exception to the excellent rule. The squad commands you gain in Act 2, on the other hand, are fairly redundant and easily ignored. Suzy finished the game on the Xbox without even noticing them.

If you choose to try out the co-op mode (and you definitely should) a lot of the game design decisions that seem frivolous suddenly make perfect sense. Take the times when you decide on a certain path – they seem needless in single-player, but with an online mate, they're a great way to break up the team and work together in different ways. Between this and the large menu of competitive multiplayer game styles and maps, you've got a huge amount of added value.

FACING FACTS

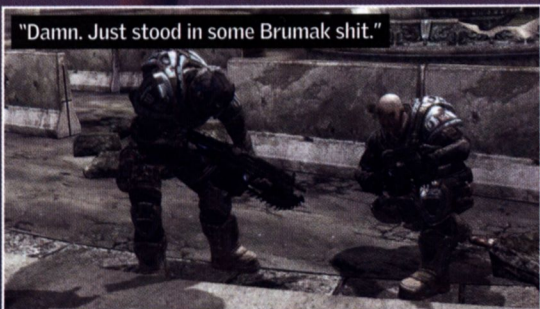
Now, let's accept the truth that you probably do know a bit about *Gears of War*. You want to know whether it's a shoddy *Resident Evil 4* rush job. You want to know about those new bits that fill the confusing gap left behind on the 360. You want me to stop saying "Have you heard of videogames? I hear some of them can be quite fun."

The biggest fear for *GOW* was being forced, by sloppy interpretation, on to a 360 controller. Not only doesn't this happen, but the ease of control and the sheer, stupid boost of enjoyment I got from the game, having previously been saddled with the 360 controller, is a slap in the face for everyone who's ever got it wrong. Everyone knows that the mouse and



Steroid abuse can have serious consequences.

"Damn. Just stood in some Brumak shit."



"Well, this can't be good."



A welcome reminder that PC gaming can do big, stupid action way better than the consoles that took stupid to the masses

Bring Your Daughter To The Slaughter

As long as she's got a *Games for Windows Live* account

Co-op aside, you can get involved in some human vs Locust bloodshed on 20 maps, including three new ones for the PC. There's the usual array of deathmatch options and the ability to revive your colleagues is carried over from the single-player. Most interesting is King of the Hill, a PC-exclusive mode in which teams fight over a small ringed area of the map. It makes for some closely fought, chaotic battles; with a full server, there'll be someone behind most walls. And we won't be playing against 360 users, so there'll be no dumbing down of the excellent mouse and keyboard controls. You will, however, need a Games for Windows Live online account, but a Silver one is free anyway.

The new maps are made by *Painkiller's* developers.



Arachnophobes may not enjoy *GOW* that much.

keyboard is the best combination for shooters, and although *GOW* came from a console, Epic's PC heritage has done the platform proud. The PC version is just plain better. Even the camera – the bane of the third-person shooter genre – doesn't cause any problems. I'm going to repeat myself and say that the squad control is rubbish again, just for the sake of saying something unpleasant.

If you finished the game on the 360, you'll have noticed a bit of a plot change at the end; that's because most of the fifth act was missing. This has been restored for the PC, and these levels are bigger, more punishing, with more distance and Locusts between checkpoints than the console version. You'll also get to hunt the 30ft tall Brumak.

TOP GEARS

The worst thing that can be said about *GOW* is simply that it takes an engaging,

well-developed combat system and works it to death. And, yes, the core gameplay is repetitive enough to occasionally break the immersion. But the loop of cover-kill-advance is broken up by just enough diversions – the blind Berserkers, the light-fearing Kryll, vehicles and bosses – to keep you engaged.

Sadly, with these distractions, the game's instinct is to patronise you with deflatingly obvious clues. It would have been nice to have been trusted – if only for a couple of minutes – before being told what to do. But like I said, if you pansy intellectuals want to walk around thinking, go read a book.

The PC version of *Gears of War* is a welcome reminder of how much better PC gaming can be, and that it can do big, stupid action way better than the consoles that took stupid to the masses. And the extra levels that won't be released on Xbox because it can't handle them? Well, that's just fucking funny. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Balance of desolation and stylised enemies
Sound Great soundtrack, great acting
Multiplayer In the main campaign and 20 online maps

- ✓ Immersive, beefy guns
- ✓ Beats the 360 version for gameplay and length
- ✓ Co-op play triples the fun
- ✗ Repetitive
- ✗ You need a Windows Live account

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Please sir, can I have war?





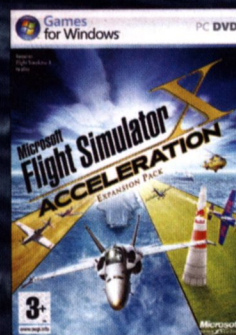
Hit the afterburners through 30+ missions that'll have you making split-second decisions at every turn. Race head to head at breakneck speeds in all-new racing modes. Navigate through eye-popping scenery built on DX10 technology. But stay focused. With new planes like the vintage P51 Mustang and state-of-the-art F/A 18, there's a lot more riding on your next move.
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Games for Windows



What's the opposite of gravity? Helicopters!



Needs a decent man-bag for all that stuff.

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

Steve Hogarty fights the War on Terror... and wins!

DEVELOPER Infinity Ward
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.callofduty.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99



AT A GLANCE...

The world's finest WWII shooter hops in a time machine and finds itself embroiled in modern combat, with all the lasers, terrorism, night vision, satellites and Apache gunships that come along with it.

Minimum system requirements:

2.4GHz (1.8GHz dual-core) processor, 512MB RAM (768MB for Vista), and a 128MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0).

HOW IT STACKS

CALL OF DUTY **94%**

CALL OF DUTY 2 **91%**

CALL OF DUTY 4 **89%**

IF YOU'RE A soldier in a war and you don't say much, and if your face isn't made out of as many polygons as your friends' faces are, and if nobody ever specifically mentions your name or talks to you, then you're probably going to die. That's what *Call of Duty 4* has taught me.

Fleming, Smithy, Bartlett: just a few good men who gave their lives for a cool ragdoll animation and a dramatic 'man down!' moment. I salute thee.

Here's what I definitely did not want when I heard that *Call Of Duty 4* was going

to be set in modern day: squad-based gameplay, with over-the-top *Ghost Recon* technology favouring strategy over bravado-saturated gunplay. I didn't want to replay the game every modern warfare shooter tries to be: that fiddly emulation of planning, ordering, tactics and military brotherhood.

Here's what I did want though: *Call Of Duty* with terrorists instead of Nazis, nukes instead of V2 rockets, a made-up angry communist instead of Adolf Hitler, and maybe – if Infinity Ward could get around to it this time – an ending. And hoorah,

because that's what we got. Even the ending, startlingly.

Call of Duty 4 is just like every other *Call of Duty* game, but in a radically different setting, and with an ounce of clever-dust sprinkled on top. Why mess with a winning formula, eh? Originality, you say? Well, it was a rhetorical question...

SURPRISE AND DELIGHT

Actually, that's slightly unfair – *Call of Duty 4* expands on the series mightily. Its Middle Eastern and Russian locales, while still linear, feel far more open than the ruined streets of Occupied France ever were, and every mission contains at least one sweet chunk of surprise and delight (that is, mostly scripted events which make you want to push your swivel chair away from your desk and shout "Wow, that was sort of cool, I liked that").

Take one of the very first missions, for example, in which you get to use your night vision in a townhouse occupied by Russians who can't afford candles. Having cut the power seconds ago, you enter the building and switch on your goggles to find enemies literally fumbling about in the dark, arms outstretched. Upstairs a panic-stricken man cowers and whimpers in a pitch-black corner, firing randomly into the darkness as you enter the room.

That touches on some part of my brain that the other *Calls of Duty* never did – a part of my brain that doesn't expect to be



A panic-stricken man whimpers in a corner, firing randomly into darkness

It's not what looking through iron sights really looks like, but it's nice.



Pripyat: an absolute gem of a level.



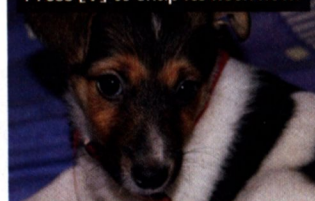
"Hmm, no oil here. Keep looking men."



Dogs

Who let them out? Barking mad!

Press [V] to snap its neck now.



Dogs! They're a rare sight in games because it gets those folks at Peta all up in arms, but *Call of Duty 4* unashamedly sports man's best friend. They're generally out to get you, and will bark and run at you until you either shoot them or they jump on your chest and rip your throat out. If you're quick enough, you can use your melee attack right before they munch your oesophagus to grab Lassie's cute little head and twist sharply until you hear a snap. And, in what can only be an homage to *Resident Evil 4*, sparing the lives of four wild dogs in Pripyat results in a touching scene later on in which those dogs maul and kill Russian soldiers. Three cheers! Although I must add that properly trained attack dogs don't bark as they chase you.

touched while my violence-loving shooty-shoot pre-frontal lobe is having all the fun. And it happens a whole lot throughout the game too, not always simple emotional tugs like a terrified terrorist (oh, the irony!), but just through sheer, overpowering atmospheric, and often powerfully beautiful scenes. It's as if the folks at Infinity Ward created a series of regular *Call of Duty* missions, then went home and each thought of five things that would make those missions

memorable, or at least meaningful. Then they all sat in a meeting room and put those ideas into the game, grinning all the while.

TAKE COVER

But what about in between all this storytelling and narrative gumph? What about the bits where you're projecting lead at subjectively evil people? Well, they're still here too, and they play out very much like they did in past *Call of Duty* games. It builds on *Call of Duty 2* in that the cues for the combat to progress are less obvious than ever, meaning offensive pushes are more fluid and player-led. You won't be sitting around waiting for your commander to give the order to move forwards, but instead picking and choosing your cover, snapping up vital ground as the fight continues.

Call of Duty 4 doesn't feel as straightforward either. Even though the world around you is meticulously designed

and seemingly devoid of rough edges, you rarely feel forced to take cover at specific points. The enemy is fairly adaptable, but with no massive renovations in the AI department. They take cover, they run from grenades, they shout things in their gibberish language, they sometimes even chuck your grenades back at you – but they're pretty much the clever-clogs Nazis we've shot before.

Of course, that style of flashy-battle warring belongs to one Sgt Paul Jackson of the US Marines, who makes up exactly half of the people you play as. The other half is Sgt 'Soap' MacTavish, and he's in the SAS, mate. The word 'wanker' is uttered but once. And even then I think it was as a joke.

BLOODY 'ELL

I've grossly simplified the story up until this point, which is rude,

We're not expecting the Hulk, are we?





The game is wrapped in a lovely sense of developing camaraderie as it trundles onwards

You go first...no, you go first.



Captain Price uses his beard to cast magic spells later in the game.

because it's a part of the game that Infinity Ward have tried hard to improve. It's not so much a moronic 'terrorists got the bomb' tale (although the terrorists do 'got the bomb'), but rather a story of a Russian bad guy supplying a Middle Eastern country with nuclear weapons in order to stage a coup and keep the Americans busy while said Ruskie rustles up some fun in the USSR. This is how the two story threads work: when

you're not playing as US Marine Jackson tied up in the Middle East, you're playing as Soap, whose squad is tracking down the Russian guy. It offers a frequent change of pace, and scenery, which again works towards keeping the game from going stale.

Soap's missions are markedly more interesting affairs, slower of pace, and sneakier of foot. They lack the large-scale street combat of the Marine campaign, being set in forested Russian countryside and farmland, but that's very clearly the point – it's a different feeling entirely. It's no more tactical than Jackson's approach to fighting terrorism, but it feels a lot more clandestine, and is wrapped in a lovely sense of developing camaraderie as the game trundles onwards.

Also, there's not a single instance in which being spotted by the enemy means

you'll have to start again (not in the annoying sense we're used to, anyway), which instantly renders the SAS missions ruddy brilliant.

FEELIN' THE SAME WAY

During both styles of warfare, that visceral and captivating tenseness of combat exuded by every *Call of Duty* game appears in force, amplified by the newfound graphical wondrousness of the engine. It's enough to make you mistakenly shout "take that, you fascist arseholes" when you really meant to shout "eat it, you freedom-hating bastards". If you're after something a bit new, well, looking down your iron-sights presents you with an extremely pleasing depth-of-field effect, otherwise it's incredibly exciting business as usual.

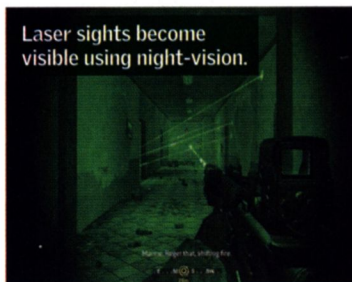
That chaotic way in which skirmishes develop, that extremely satisfying feeling of killing somebody (aided by crazily accurate procedural death animations, blending ragdolls and pre-scripted movements), that sense of utter hopelessness as you become pinned down behind cover in a hailstorm of screaming bullets – *Call of Duty 4* is as powerful, exhilarating and relentless as ever.

In fact, when the game carries you off to the as-seen-in-*STALKER* wrecked city of



Scripted animations are amazingly fluid.

Laser sights become visible using night-vision.





The finale, in which the terrorists chase you back to London.



Skirmishes develop into chaos...

Pripyat, it presents the best moments of the entire *Call of Duty* series. The prevailing mournful atmosphere, the bleak silence, the desaturated hues – it's a sneaking mission like none I've ever witnessed, as you and your buddy, armed with sniper rifles and dressed in full ghillie suits, make your way through the destroyed urban centre to reach your objective. It's utterly thrilling, the sort of thing that makes me want to award this game a Classic and most definitely where the game peaks.

Very soon after this moment of brilliance, the game hits a brick wall of mediocrity and you'll find yourself trudging unenthusiastically

through the final hours of the game. A mixture of bad checkpoint placement, bizarre difficulty spikes, lazy design and blatant enemy spawn points suck the fun right out of proceedings.

YOU WIN

Such an odd dip in quality we can only attribute to possible time constraints, but it's definitely there. If I had a virtual highlighter pen I could mark out a distinct fraction of the game that's simply, inexcusably rubbish. And then, magically, it surprises with a superb ending that flies in the face of the typical fade-to-black *Call of Duty* closures we've had previously.

And so, *Call of Duty 4* remains an accomplished game, a stylistic departure for the series which lifts it effortlessly from the tedium of historical combat and into the realms of fictional modern warfare, tapping into society's paranoia with willful glee. It transplants even the trademark on-rails sections we (mostly) love into a chilling, deadpan commentary on the disconnected nature of blokes in planes who press buttons



Urgh, I hated this bit.

Multiplayer warfare

Call of Duty 4's online minglings investigated

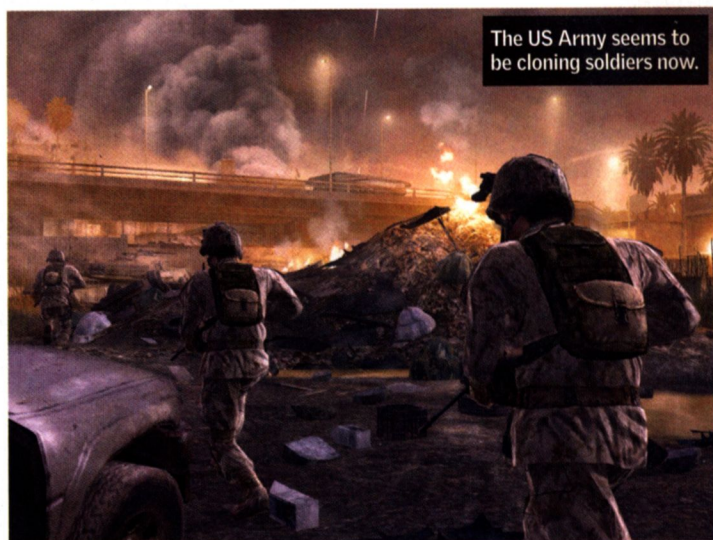
Modern Warfare's single-player isn't a big departure from the other *Call of Duty* games, but the multiplayer introduces a ton of original ideas. The main addition is a persistent stats system tied to your online profile, which raises your rank and gradually unlocks bonuses, called Perks. One of these Perks, Last Stand, is a surprising one – having blasted an enemy through a doorway, you boldly prance over to where the alleged dead body is lying, only to be shot full in the face before the foe lying on the ground takes his last breath!

Other Perks include the ability to call in lethal helicopter attacks, pulling the pin on a grenade before you die and unlocking additional weapons such as a sniper rifle. Options

are unlocked pretty quickly too (this isn't a grind for veterans) and you can use up to three Perks for your character in the excellent, RPG-flavoured 'create-a-class' system. There are also bonuses for multiple kills, such as being able to use a remote aerial drone to spot enemies, and a host of spiffing weapon upgrades such as faster reload times, more powerful explosives and improved aiming. A great deal more than a tacked-on multiplayer mode, then.



"Let's just wait around here for a cutscene to start."



The US Army seems to be cloning soldiers now.



The sobering aerial bombing bit is ace.

and watch things exploding on fuzzy black and white screens.

We've essentially been given all of the things we've asked of Infinity Ward – *Call of Duty* with better graphics, better set-pieces, a story, some characters and an ending. And dogs. Go read my box about the dogs. Oh, and watch the game's credits right to the end – there's a secret surprise for those patient enough to wait. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Beautiful, runs like delicious hot sauce
Sound Amazing fidelity, lovely explosions
Multiplayer Innovative, and arousing

- ✓ Pretty
- ✓ Clever set-pieces
- ✓ Interesting multiplayer
- ✓ It has an ending
- ✗ Rubbish bit near the end

89

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ONLINE GAMING”** – PC Zone



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— Gamespot



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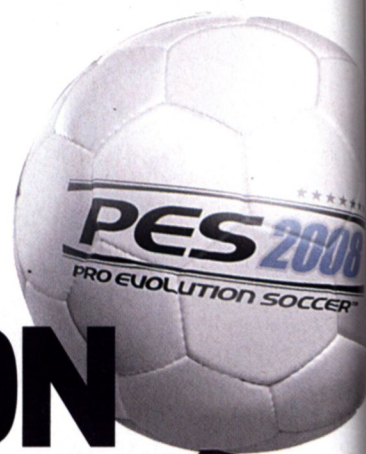




Crouch rapidly restrained from performing comedy robot dance.



England, shortly before choking dramatically in Russia.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008

Steve Hill puts his boot on the other foot...

DEVELOPER Konami
PUBLISHER Konami
WEBSITE www.pes2008.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The long running series earns a year-based monicker and attempts to woo the casual gamer with a more arcade-oriented approach.

Minimum system requirements:
1.4GHz processor, 512 MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 1.1 support).

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008 **87%**

FIFA 08 **80%**

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2006-2007 **70%**

If the bile-ridden postings of largely illiterate internet warriors are to be believed, the war between FIFA and PES may have to be resolved in the street, with indignant fans of the respective games going at each other with razor-embedded joypads.

While the debate that surrounds releasing essentially the same game every year is best left for another time, the plain fact is that we are blessed with two excellent football games that cater for different markets. FIFA has always been about glossy aesthetics allied to pick-up-and-play gameplay, whereas PES has always been uglier but deeper, largely appealing to the hardcore gamer. However, as we hinted at last year, they are in danger of turning into each other.

Last year's PES 6 was berated in some quarters for being too difficult to score

goals, requiring players to adopt the correct body shape and timing. Even so, the ball would regularly fly over the bar if you held down the shoot button for more than a quarter of a picosecond. While this was anathema to the much-derided casual gamer, it's what the hardcore craved. Besides, it's the relative paucity of goals in football compared to other sports that makes them so special, something that the majority of Americans struggle to comprehend.

So what do we get for PES 2008? An Xbox 360 port, and a veritable goal feast. From a drought to a flood, the goals fly in from all angles, with high-scoring games the norm and goal-less draws proving rarer than a good steak. In many ways, this is Hollywood football, with defenders dribbling from their own halves into the opposition area, much to the surprise of the all-new commentary team of John Champion and Mark Lawrenson.

COMPLETE CONTROL

Despite the renewed openness of the play, it's still undeniably PES, boasting the robust controls that the series is renowned for.

Can South Korea hold out for an historic victory over Brazil? Yes.



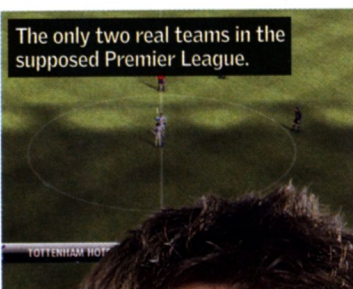
Gary Neville in nosebleed territory.

Immediately familiar, it's reassuring to know that if you ping a crossfield ball to a winger, he'll generally be able to control it and continue the attack. And when you concede a goal, it's either because you were fairly beaten, or you made a mistake in football terms as opposed to wrestling with the game controls.

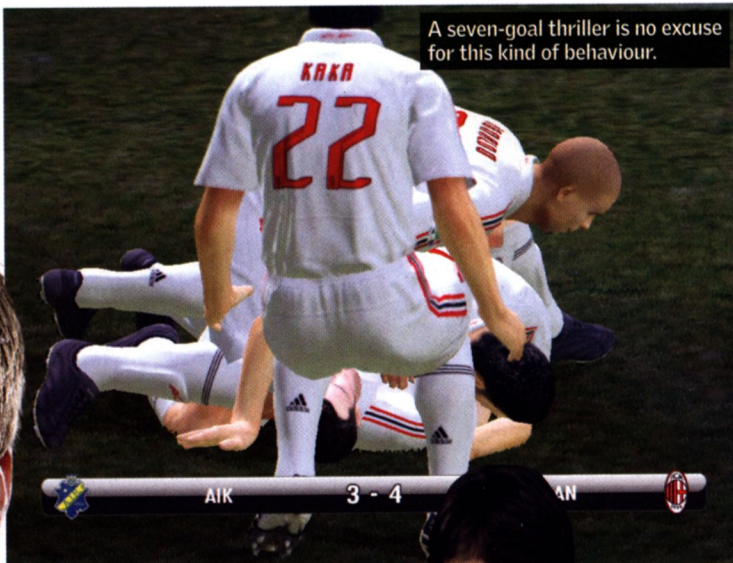
Apparently, this year's quantum leap on the gameplay front is Teamvision, whereby the AI monitors your tactics and reacts accordingly, requiring you to mix it up a bit. To be honest, if we hadn't been told about it, we probably wouldn't have noticed, and it seems like little more than something to fill a press release. What we have noticed is that once you take the lead, the opposition seems to make a more concerted effort to equalise (as you'd expect), which accounts for the number of end-to-end games.

PES has always lagged behind FIFA on the licensing front, and depressingly this is again the case with 2008.

The only two real teams in the supposed Premier League.

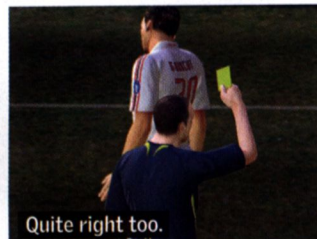


A seven-goal thriller is no excuse for this kind of behaviour.



Cheat! Cheat! Cheat!!!!

An absolute disgrace



Quite right too.

Football has undergone many changes in recent years, with the influx of foreigners arguably leading to a different set of values than the traditional tenets of sporting honour. We are of course talking about dirty filthy cheats, which make a controversial appearance in *PES 2008*. Whereas shirt pulling is innocuous and tricky to carry off, diving enables you to throw yourself to the floor in an attempt to fool the referee, who in fairness is generally wise to your antics. During this review we received a succession of yellow cards for diving, and managed to con the ref into a solitary penalty, which we promptly slammed against the post...



This caption caused Owen yet another groin injury.



The more famous players are largely recognisable. That's Kaka.

We've begrudgingly accepted the lack of lower division teams, but the Premier League itself is still a joke, with only the inclusion of the correctly named Newcastle United and Tottenham Hotspur standing out amidst the mire of Merseyside Reds and West London Blues. It's enough to tempt you to the foreign leagues, where the teams are at least more authentic.

For the hardcore *PES* fan, the Master League is still where it's at, offering the choice of a team with fictional players, an actual team with actual players, or a custom club of your own, replete with your own choice of kit. Either way, it's a long-term investment, able to sap away a rainy afternoon in a blur of goalmouth action.

If we wanted to get splinters in our arse, we could make a claim for buying both *PES* and *FIFA*. While we are often swayed by the razzmatazz of the latter, within one-half of one game it becomes apparent which is the better game. That's *PES*, by the way. **PCZ**



PCZONE

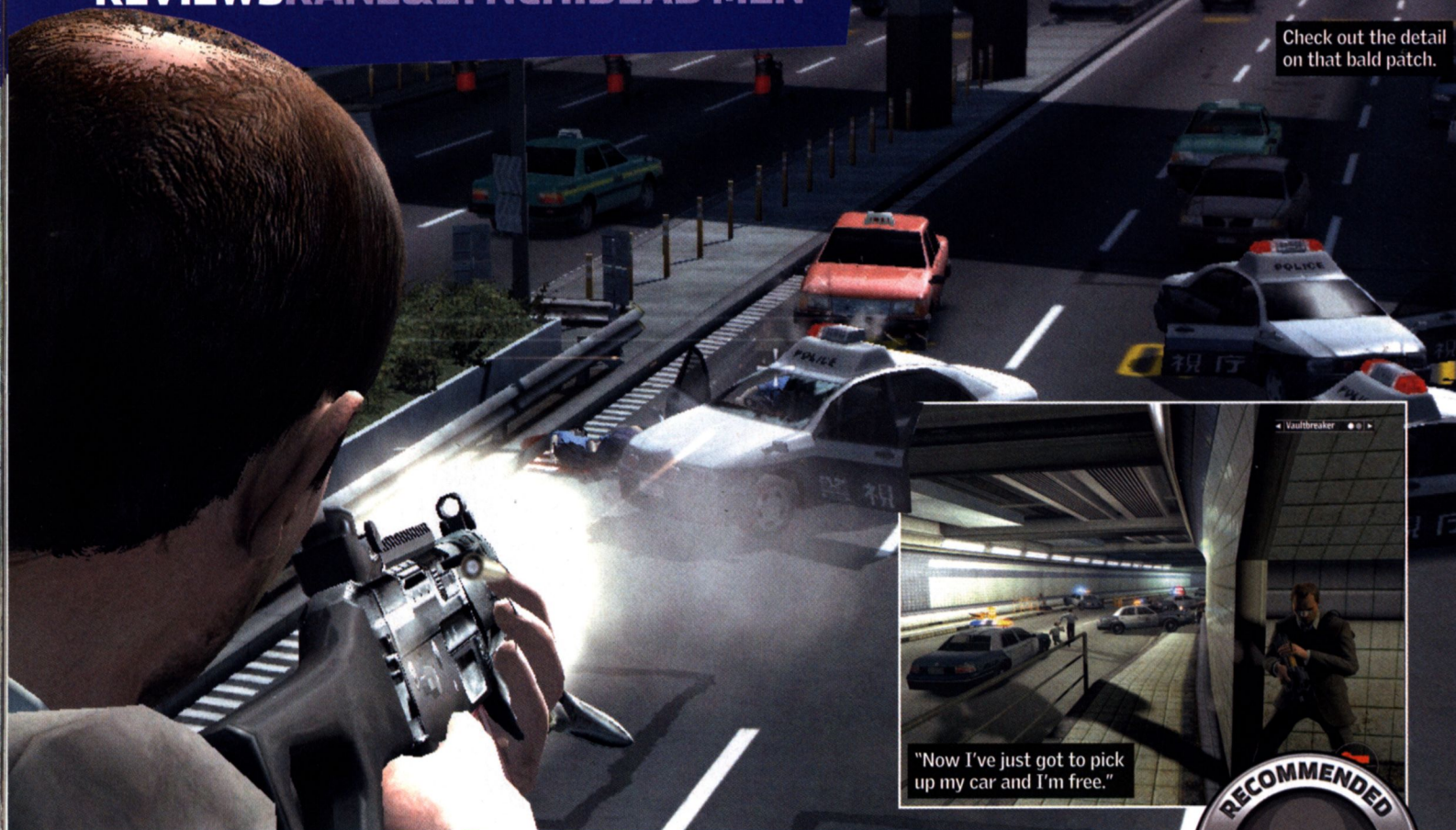
Graphics Average
Sound Improved
commentary, vile music
Multiplayer Online and off

- ✓ Robust controls
- ✓ Breathless gameplay
- ✓ Facial likenesses
- ✗ Usual licensing nonsense
- ✗ Some cheap goals
- ✗ Limited online features

87

Half rice, half chips

Check out the detail on that bald patch.



KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

Downing a handful of pills, Suzy Wallace prepares for the busy day of crime ahead...

DEVELOPER Io Interactive
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.kaneandlynch.com
ETA 23 Nov
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Two anti-heroes pick up guns and go blasting in a *Heat*-style tale of revenge and violent crime.

Minimum system requirements: 2.0GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 3.0 support).

HOW IT STACKS

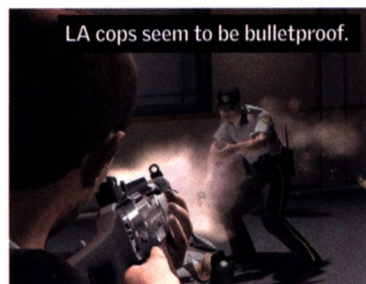
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY **84%**

KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN **79%**

FREEDOM FIGHTERS **75%**

IFOR ONE, am bored of goody-goody heroes. Save the world from alien invasion here, overthrow an evil dictator there and rescue the attractive women while you're at it. No doubt they go home and spend their free time rescuing kittens that have got stuck up trees before organising their local neighbourhood watch as well. Give me a gun-toting anti-hero any day.

Well it seems that Io Interactive have been listening to my wishes. The duo of Kane and Lynch make a particularly unsavoury pair, with Kane the ex-mercenary and Lynch filling the role of pill-popping psychopath.



The banter between the two, which more often than not puts even my levels of swearing to shame, contrasts neatly with the usual friendly chat between characters (Alyx, I'm looking at you), providing a refreshing change from the norm.

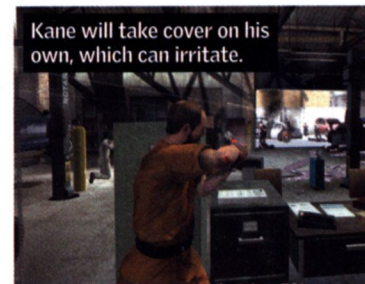
The game starts off in spectacular fashion, with one of the most adrenaline-filled starting levels I've experienced, as you're busted out of your prison van by a group of masked gunmen. As bullets fly through the air and your screen slowly clears from the haze of the crash, you're dumped fully into the deep end, with police, helicopters and SWAT teams all taking a pop at you before you make your escape. It doesn't stop there either, with the game moving from one thrilling set-piece to another. Robbing banks, car chases, rappelling down buildings and breaking into prisons all provide some brilliantly cinematic levels and serve to keep the game moving along at a steady pace (although I found the last couple of levels more 'meh' than 'wow').

Gameplay itself is pretty straightforward and fast-paced, consisting purely of shooting

the crap out of everything, so it's a relatively brainless (but enjoyable) experience.

Constant shoot-outs with the police also serve to give the game more than a whiff of the movie *Heat*, especially one of the later levels which sees your team engaged in a fully fledged street battle, à la the Pacino/De Niro/fat guy who was once Batman gun battle of the film.

The levels are only really let down by one in particular that features a particularly unintuitive bit that had me slamming the mouse in frustration for hours before figuring out the deceptively simple but very unclear solution.





Constant shoot-outs with the police give the game more than a whiff of the movie *Heat*



Prison orange is all the fashion in L.A.

Combat, though, is a rather less polished affair than the set-pieces. While the game features a cover system, it's nowhere near as accomplished as, say, *Gears of War*. Just walking close to an obstacle makes your character take cover, leading to some inevitably frustrating moments when you'll find yourself stuck up against a wall when really you just wanted to run past it.

POPPERS

While you can blind-fire from behind cover, of far more use is the ability to pop out and take aim for more precision. But this is blighted by the fact that shots sometimes



The dialogue can be a bit rude.

Jesus fucking Christ! He killed the hostages. How fucked is that?

disappear into the object you're taking cover behind and, on occasion, your character will fail to fall back behind cover when finished, leaving you stuck in the middle of the crossfire and, more often than not, dead on the floor just a few seconds later.

Perhaps my biggest annoyance, though, was that at times you can empty entire clips into enemies who seem impervious to your fire, most notably in the car chases where you can headshoot the pursuing policemen to no effect. Apparently, bullet-proof noggins are standard issue with the US police nowadays. There's also some slightly awkward squad control too (when is



Kane even had time to stop off for a nose job.



Partners in Crime

Think you've got a good group of mates to play online with? Think again...

One of *Kane & Lynch*'s highlights is its variety of multiplayer options. Each level can be played co-op, although bizarrely it's split-screen only (one has to use a 360 controller) rather than over a LAN. But the real trump card up Io's bloody sleeve is the Fragile Alliance mode. Eight players per team play against the police while carrying out a heist, with the winner being the player to get away with the most money. But here comes the interesting part. At any time, you can betray your teammates and take their money for yourself. Die once and you come back as a policeman, with the possibility for revenge. Die twice and it's game over. Let the double-crossing commence!



"You looking at me?"



Bank raids have never been so much fun as this.

squad control ever not?) although, unlike *Freedom Fighters*, it's hardly ever needed.

FIRST-RATE CO-OPS

Annoyances aside, the game features some brilliant multiplayer options (see boxout), and visually it's a maelstrom of beautiful carnage. Despite actually looking ropery on next-gen consoles, on PC it really sparkles, with crisp, detailed characters and gorgeous scenery in some trademark inventive settings – although if I was forced to pick faults, the explosions are a bit lacking.

Though somewhat let down by its combat, *Kane & Lynch* is still well worth a play, even if it's just for the cinematic feel of the levels, the refreshingly different characters and the excellent multiplayer. While it's never too challenging and is pretty short – racking up only about seven hours of play – if you want to feel like a bad guy but without the police chase, prison and bum rape that normally follows, then shooting up the place as Kane provides a good end to a bad day. Or maybe that's something I should discuss with my shrink... **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Crisp and detailed
Sound Jesper Kyd's usual quality
Multiplayer Co-op and online

- ✓ Some brilliant levels
- ✓ Interesting characters
- ✓ Non-stop action
- ✓ Rappelling down buildings!
- ✗ Combat is sometimes unsatisfying
- ✗ Automatic cover doesn't work very well

79

Crime does pay!

Dell™ recommends Windows Vista® Home Premium.



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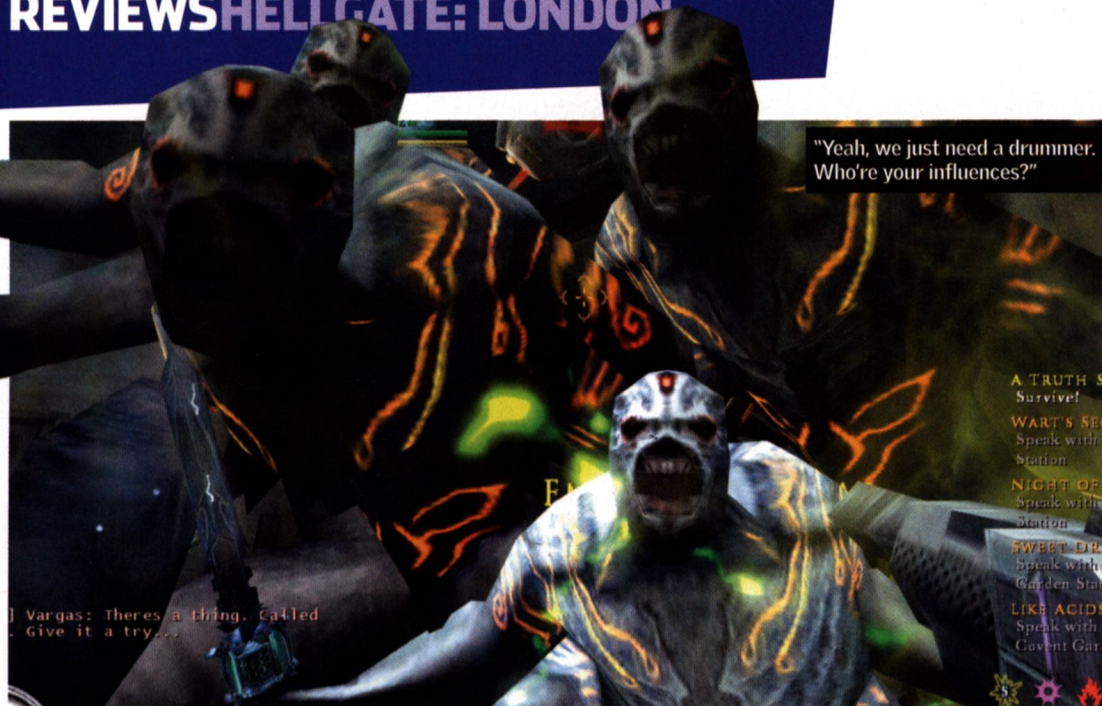
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"Yeah, we just need a drummer. Who're your influences?"

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Keep to the left.



Drunk girls: cool.

HELLGATE: LONDON

Jon Blyth charges his Oyster card with a travelcard for zones 1 to hell

DEVELOPER Flagship Studios
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
www.hellgatelondon.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

LONDON. A WRETCHED, smoky eyesore, overrun by demonic overspill, and populated mainly by hand-claspingly sycophantic homosexuals and fat-tongued cockney imbeciles. At least, that's what the scriptwriters and voice actors at Flagship seem to think. Within minutes, I'd had sexual advances from a besotted Techsmith, although he'd probably have said the same sycophantic ear-scratch to a female character. An hour later, I bumped into a shy tribute to Morrissey who refused to meet my eye (nice touch), but bellowed a randomly-selected pick of his stock phrases with the thick shout of a Cornish bumpkin (not such a nice touch).

The roughly 25 per cent amusing, 75 per cent mortifying script and voice acting is

one of the most immediate barriers to enjoying *Hellgate*, a game which is otherwise immediately very playable. The storyline involves a demonic assault on a post-Olympics London, but unfolds so slowly and un-engagingly that looking through my notes, I've got "Hellgates", "I am the HERO!" and "Who is this seer guy?" written down, and I'm still none the wiser. The story is just generic enough to ignore, as you focus on the geographical progress, which involves winning favour with a chain of London Underground stations. These act as hubs to dungeons, new areas of London, and eventually the next Tube station.

NECROLEPSY

Character selection is a breeze; in that it's easy, and a little weak. There are six classes, but it boils

down to pet-users (Summoner and Engineer), melee specialists (Guardian, Blademaster), spell-users (Evoker), and I'd-Rather-Be-Playing-Doom (Marksman). Each character has strong attacks and is responsible for his own health levels. Tactics start off with damage avoidance and potions, but all classes eventually learn healing skills to divert costs into their regenerating mana supply. I say mana, it's actually called power, but... well, it's the blue sphere on the bottom right, and that's mana, yeah?

Your choice of perspective is pretty much made for you by the class you choose. Marksman and Engineers won't find the

AT A GLANCE...

A long-awaited 3D reiteration of the classic *Diablo* formula from Flagship, a company assembled from the people of *Diablo*'s Blizzard daddies.

Minimum system requirements:
1.8GHz processor (2.4Ghz for Vista),
1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), DirectX
9.0c, and a 128MB graphics card
with Pixel Shader 2.0.

HOW IT STACKS

DIABLO 2 93%

TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE 77%

HELLGATE: LONDON 74%



Zone 6: always a challenge



third-person view an option, because pulling back the camera forces you to aim uselessly at the ground. You'll only really use the third-person if you're dual-wielding a couple of swords, because you just watched *Ninja Scroll* or something.

The first-person works well, though. A green reticule means something's in range, and so long as you point within the green box, the rest is down to imaginary dice rolls. It's a decent enough compromise of action and role-playing, and makes the action scenes feel more... well, action-packed.

A warning to the pet-using classes, though – for the early levels, you have no control over them. Your job will be to chase them around, getting them out of any pickles and scrapes they get into. Word to Flagship – nobody liked Scrappy Doo.

CENTRE POINT

So, action. Action, action, action! Is all this action at the expense of the RPG side? Depends what you mean by RPG. You never really fell like your avatar has a personality, and in a world populated by awful cockney gobshites, you'll never fall into character beyond saying "yeah I got this mission let's kill some monsters yeah".

If you mean loot, levelling up, and dungeons, then you're more in luck. Loot is constantly spitting out of corpses, and is based on the familiar colour-coded scale of common to legendary. It's also randomly generated as you kill, with enough higher-

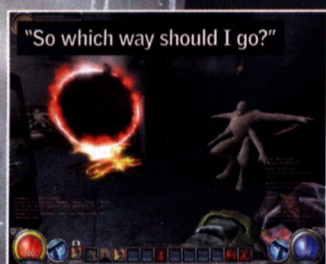


end stuff coming out to have you quickly clad in rare loot.

Speaking of random generation, the feted dungeon generation of *Rogue*-likes – and more notably, *Diablo* – is intact, too. This does increase, to an extent, the replayability of some areas, leaving you only with repetitive monsters, design and increasing easiness to fatigue you to an area. But it also has the potential to stifle more imaginative designs; to stop the dungeons being anything other than a linear-feeling trudge. Very little of the likeable sprawl that is London makes it into the game. It's therefore a relief to note that not all areas are random. Covent Garden,



Very little of the likeable sprawl that is London makes it into the game



Play before you pay

Don't fork out cash before you go elite

It's the burning question that literally everyone in the world's fashion centres of Tokyo and Milan are asking; should I pay for a *Hellgate* subscription? I'd use the generously-featured free service to make your mind up. If she grows on you, then you can think about buying Elite membership, and all the guild creating, arena PvP, and content updates. The free membership is perfect for working out whether you're into it or not.



for example, remains intact, and impressively like the real thing.

Hellgate is very much geared to be a multiplayer game – the single-player version feels ultimately pointless. If you play computer games to avoid idiots, then the NPCs will infuriate you far more than any 12 year-old yelling 'L2P n00bz0R'. Having said that, the group fighting mechanic is probably the game's weakest element. The classes are all so geared to attack that the instances become a strategy-free slaughter and loot-grab, fostering suspicion and greed as much as teamwork. My game crashed after finishing a dungeon, and I'm certain the Swedish guy I was playing with thought I was running off with some legendary loot.

Flagship appear to be issuing patches left, right and centre, so I shouldn't dwell on the following issues for too long in case they fix them, simply to make me look stupid. But there are elements of glitchiness still. A few times, I'd find myself teleporting into the floor of an area, forcing me to go out and come back in again. The framerates on the DirectX 10 version dropped to unplayable levels at more chaotic times, even though the DX9 version ran fine on the same PC.

EMERGING VICTORIES?

Hellgate, however, does reward those who persevere. There's nearly always a lull in this kind of game – it's just a shame that *Hellgate*'s lull happens from about Level 6-10. A tip for keeping your interest – spread out your skill points. Not only are you learning new things to do to fend off the

repetition, the bonuses for specialising heavily in a certain area are nowhere near as pronounced as in *Diablo*. And once you have this spread of skills, there's more to notice, more ways to combine fighting skills – and most importantly, more ways to make you feel like you're playing well.

That's what's lacking at the outset, and it's pronounced enough to potentially alienate a lot of people. *Hellgate*'s done itself a disservice, because it's hidden some decent fun underneath a dated, linear and difficult-to-love veneer. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Lovely, if a bit samey
Sound SHUT UP, YOU AWFUL
VOICE ACTORS
Multiplayer Optional, but you should definitely use it

- ✓ Non-stop, lively action
- ✓ Doesn't take itself too seriously
- ✓ A treat for loot-lovers
- ✗ Needs time and patches
- ✗ Humour often misses the mark by a wide mile

74

London Underwhelmed

RAIL SIMULATOR®

Freedom to drive your rail world!

This is the game that rail enthusiasts have been waiting for! Rail Simulator® provides the most realistic simulation of trains possible on a PC. Plus we provide you, the player, with powerful tools to create your own railway world.



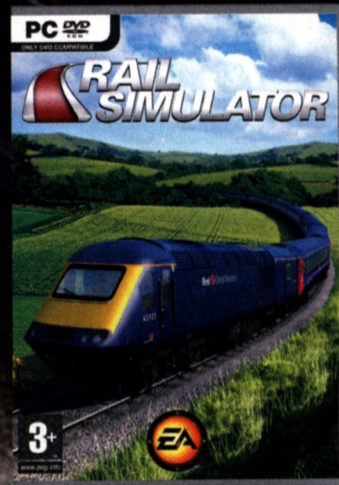
- Stunningly realistic graphics and audio deliver an immersive train driving experience.
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- Passenger and freight operations - each requiring specific skills.



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- Free-rom experience for those who prefer a more leisurely approach.
- Four real-world routes, each one on average 90 miles long and both historic and current environments are featured.

railsimulator.com



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JAPAN



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FEUDAL ANARCHY.

WILL YOU STAND THE TEST OF TIME?

AGE
OF
EMPIRES
The
Asian
Dynasties
III

WWW.AGEOFEMPIRES3.COM



Did I mention it's
interracial too?

THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE

Our destination: misogynistic violence

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

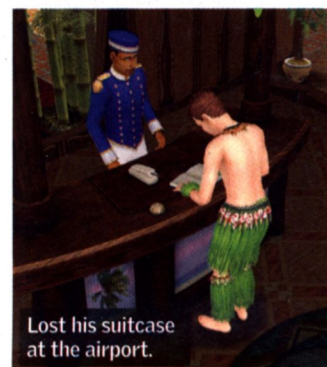


Minimum system requirements:
1.3GHz processor, 512MB RAM and
128MB graphics card.

SHOCKING. I'M ACTUALLY shocked. This is what happened when I played *Bon Voyage* and what I can only assume is the entire point of the expansion.

I dressed my Sim in a grass skirt and sent him off to a Hawaiian village (one of three holiday locations) where, having booked a hotel room, he came across a woman. This woman, for no real reason other than social incompatibility algorithms, took a disliking to my Sim, a disliking that culminated in a bold confrontation around the hotel's hot tub that night. While four men relaxed in the tub, a heated science debate erupted mere feet away – my Sim claimed 'rockets', this woman insisted 'atoms'. Tempers flared.

So my Sim hit her – he physically assaulted the woman in a savage beating that lasted half an hour. Instead of helping the victim, the four



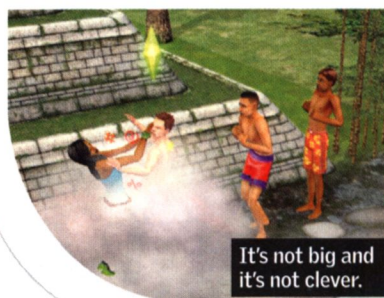
Lost his suitcase
at the airport.

men hopped out of the tub and started cheering. They whooped and shook their hands in the air as the woman desperately tried to escape the vicious attack, only to be brutally dragged back into the affray for a further thrashing.

An expansion pack which, as far as I can ascertain, is almost exclusively about violence against women? Why, this sounds like the unearthly scraping of barrel-bottoms. How about knocking one out about magic tricks or something before you go developing this frankly offensive software?

Bon Voyage also contains some jewellery.

Steve Hogarty



It's not big and
it's not clever.

PCZONE
38
As fun as malaria



BLAZING ANGELS 2: SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII

Is it secret? Is it safe?

DEVELOPER Ubisoft (Romania)
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE blazing-angels.us.ubi.com/secretmissions
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

Min system req:
 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 64MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0).

SPARE A MOMENT for all the brave air servicemen who've died protecting our country. But now forget their memories because *BA2* is as close to the real events of WWII as Gordon Brown is to posing naked in *Playgirl*.

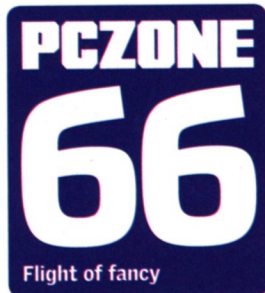
After jetting to a few locations to hand pick your squadron, *BA2* sends you on a variety of missions. It's not just dogfights and firebombing Dresden: you destroy bridges, drop people on trains, and shoot zeppelins while flying around the Pyramids, and other iconic buildings, in hypothetical planes wielding unlikely weapons.

This is all entertaining, and there's enough diversity to keep anybody's

attention with simple, arcadey controls. There are low points though, such as the so-bad-they're-hilarious comic book cutscenes, complete with dodgy voice-overs and no mention of Nazis or Hitler (the latter merely being referred to as "the menace in Berlin" not "that mass-murdering lunatic"). Then there's the fact that one level has a difficulty level that's more Mike Tyson than the Hugh Grant standard present in the rest of the game, and also some fiddly controller setup.

Despite this, it's an improvement on the original and if you fancy landing a plane on the Champs-Élysées, this may be your only way to wing it.

Suzy Wallace



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FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE
FROM COLONIAL RULE.

WILL YOU STAND THE TEST OF TIME?

AGE
OF
EMPIRES
The
Asian Dynasties
III

WWW.AGEOFEMPIRES3.COM



He's still got it. The dodgy ankle, that is.

New Wembley: finally finished, and in the game.



Don't laugh, it could happen.



The in-game ticker relays the joyous news.



FIFA 08

Steve Hill on the touchline with his annual review

DEVELOPER EA Canada
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
www.fifa08.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Not really what you buy a PC for, but if your PS2 is broken this will do nicely.

Minimum system requirements:
1.3GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008 87%

FIFA 08 80%

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2006-2007 70%

DEEP INTO ITS second decade as a major franchise, you'd like to think that FIFA had got it right by now. It's an ever-changing beast though, not least due to the introduction of new platforms. With the Xbox 360 version in its second incarnation, it's surprising that the PC gets lumbered with a shoddy port of the PS2 game. However, scratch beneath the surface of the 'press R2' instructions and the PC has actually had a result, as this a far more honed affair than its 360 and PS3 brethren. And besides, it's practically unplayable with anything but a PS2 pad.

In case you thought that EA released the same game every year, *FIFA 08* comes with three in-game videos outlining exactly what's new. The manual through ball control theoretically enables you to play forwards in more accurately; likewise the manual crossing, which should let you stick it on the striker's head. They're both

much of a muchness; a bigger deal is being able to directly control the goalkeeper both in open play and at set pieces, although unfortunately it didn't work with our PS2 pad. There are also some interesting co-op modes, including 'Be A Pro', where you control one player on the pitch.

TICKER CONSPIRACY

As ever, EA has pushed the boat out in terms of licensing, including a staggering number of leagues, teams and authentic players, and it does genuinely make a difference being able to play as your shithouse League Two club. As a multimedia world of football, *FIFA 08* is unrivalled, extending to in-game podcasts and even a news ticker giving real-world scores and fixtures while you play. It's an excellent feature, even if it can cause you to occasionally take your eye off the ball.

As for the all-important gameplay, it's not wildly different from last season, with more than a nod to the flowing movement of *Pro Evolution Soccer*. In general, it's end-to-end stuff, with the scores kept realistic by some superhuman goalkeeping. The tackling has been improved, and while the whole thing can feel a bit spongy, it still plays a decent game of football. And if you don't like it, there'll be another one along soon. **PCZ**



Offside, but was he in an active area?



Beckham reveals previously unseen Heimlich expertise.

PCZONE

Graphics Average
Sound Superb commentary
Multiplayer Online and off, co-op and player vs player

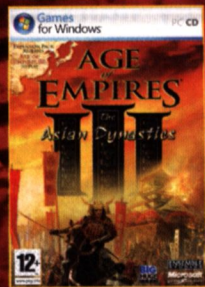
- ✓ Instantly playable
- ✓ Highly authentic
- ✓ Good online options
- ✗ Some tournament irregularities
- ✗ Not quite PES

80

World of Sport

AGE
of
EMPIRES
The
Asian Dynasties

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UNFURL STORIES OF THE GREAT ASIAN POWERS.
DROWN YOUR ENEMIES IN A SEA OF RED.



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POWERFUL CIVILIZATIONS THAT HAVE STOOD THE
TEST OF TIME. FIGHT TO MAKE THEM IMMORTAL.

Unite Japan under the revered Tokugawa Shogun. Command China's Ming Dynasty fleets into untold treasures of the Americas. Stamp out colonial interlopers from atop a mighty war elephant in India. And prove that your place in history isn't just another chapter. It's a whole new age.



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Games for Windows



The entire team was stunned by the sight of the world's smallest dragon.



A bad guy. Possibly.

THE WITCHER

A grey-haired mercenary, shunned by society, but enough about *Richie Shoemaker*...

DEVELOPER CD Projekt
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.thewitcher.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

An RPG that puts story before stats, and that even fantasy haters will quickly start to enjoy.

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 2.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION 95%

THE WITCHER 88%

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2 86%

FANTASY GAMES COME in many shapes and sizes, but most of them strictly follow the code of featuring the great, the good and the virtuous fending off the bad, the corrupted and the green-skinned. Sex is generally confined to a pretty elf wearing a chain mail bra, and political comment never strays much further than a Greenpeace quest in which raw magic has infected some wandering hedgehog creatures and not only rendered them mad, but also significantly upped their armour stats.

The Witcher, then, enters our midst as somewhat of a game of our times. The authorities in and around the plague-ridden city of Vizima perpetuate a culture of fear and suspicion – freedom fighters could just as easily be called terrorists and racial segregation is rife. Moral values aren't so much blurred as smudged about the place by a recently-licked thumb – even those who

might openly oppose the oppressors are seeking some kind of capitol gain, the undead have a conscience, drug use is a major issue and individuals will use whatever means necessary to get their way – by telling porkies, by betrayal, or by allowing you pump them for information. And by that I mean with sex.

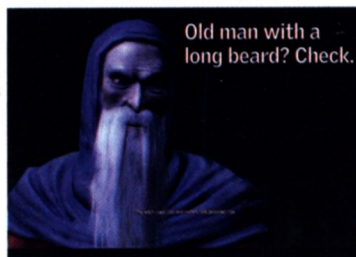
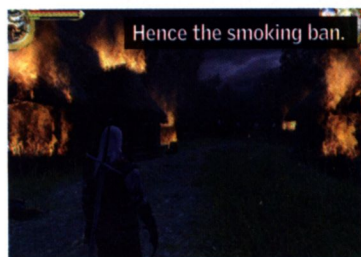
Characters doing the nasty are often hidden behind layered and blurred sequences, and you don't get to see much drug abuse (thankfully, since it appears the offending material must be applied to one's bell end) but with mention of rape, suicide and revenge, the world of *The Witcher* makes Azeroth et al look like Balamory.

NAUGHTY NECROMANCY

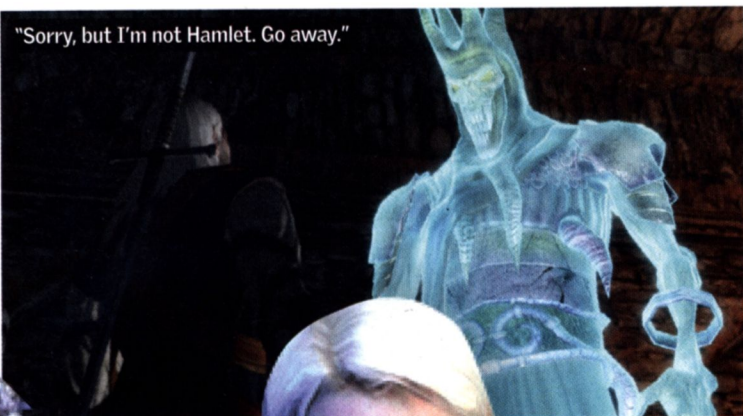
The story focuses on you, Witcher 'White Wolf' Geralt, one of a roving band of mercenary monster hunters. The crumbling fortress of their once revered clan has been

attacked and the secrets behind your mutation abilities are stolen. It's your job to find a way to recover the secrets before they are put to nefarious use, all whilst finding out about your past and that of your dwindling clan. It's perhaps not the most exciting premise, but the presentation and pacing of the story is excellent throughout, from the lengthy opening cinematic even to the hand-drawn screens that guard the transitions as new areas load into memory. Most noteworthy are the cutscenes, which have been storyboarded and edited with real cinematic flair and, together with the voiceovers and script, make *The Witcher* one of the best examples of interactive fiction I've enjoyed.

Those who like to spend hours rolling characters and selecting facial furniture might be upset to hear that you get what you're given. Geralt is square-jawed, with cat-like eyes, white hair and a face that's endured more stitches than a Bangladeshi T-shirt factory. You can't even change his name. Customisation comes later, with experience points turned into coin, that can be spent on new and upgraded skills. There are no character classes to speak of. *The Witcher* is a master swordsman, with disciplines that vary from heavy-hitting armour twattage (our term), to fast attack and dealing with groups. You spend your



"Sorry, but I'm not Hamlet. Go away."



The Witcher's HUD is fairly unobtrusive.



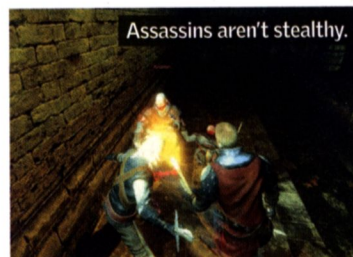
Glowy, misty, symbol things – another staple of RPGs.

Rape, suicide and revenge... The Witcher makes Azeroth et al look like Balamory

bronze, silver and gold experience coins on specialising in these, either using your normal Witcher's sword, or your silver one.

As you learn (or, rather, relearn, since you seem to be forever recovering from amnesia), spells in the form of 'signs' become available, which can be upgraded in the same way as your fighting and attribute skills. And as you find and read books and scrolls, your in-game info repository allows you new abilities and to take on new missions.

The game's structure is a series of chapters, with some quests spanning and evolving across a number of acts, and of course a fair number of side-quests that require you to go somewhere and slice up a



Assassins aren't stealthy.

specified number of monsters and bring back evidence of the massacre to secure a reward.

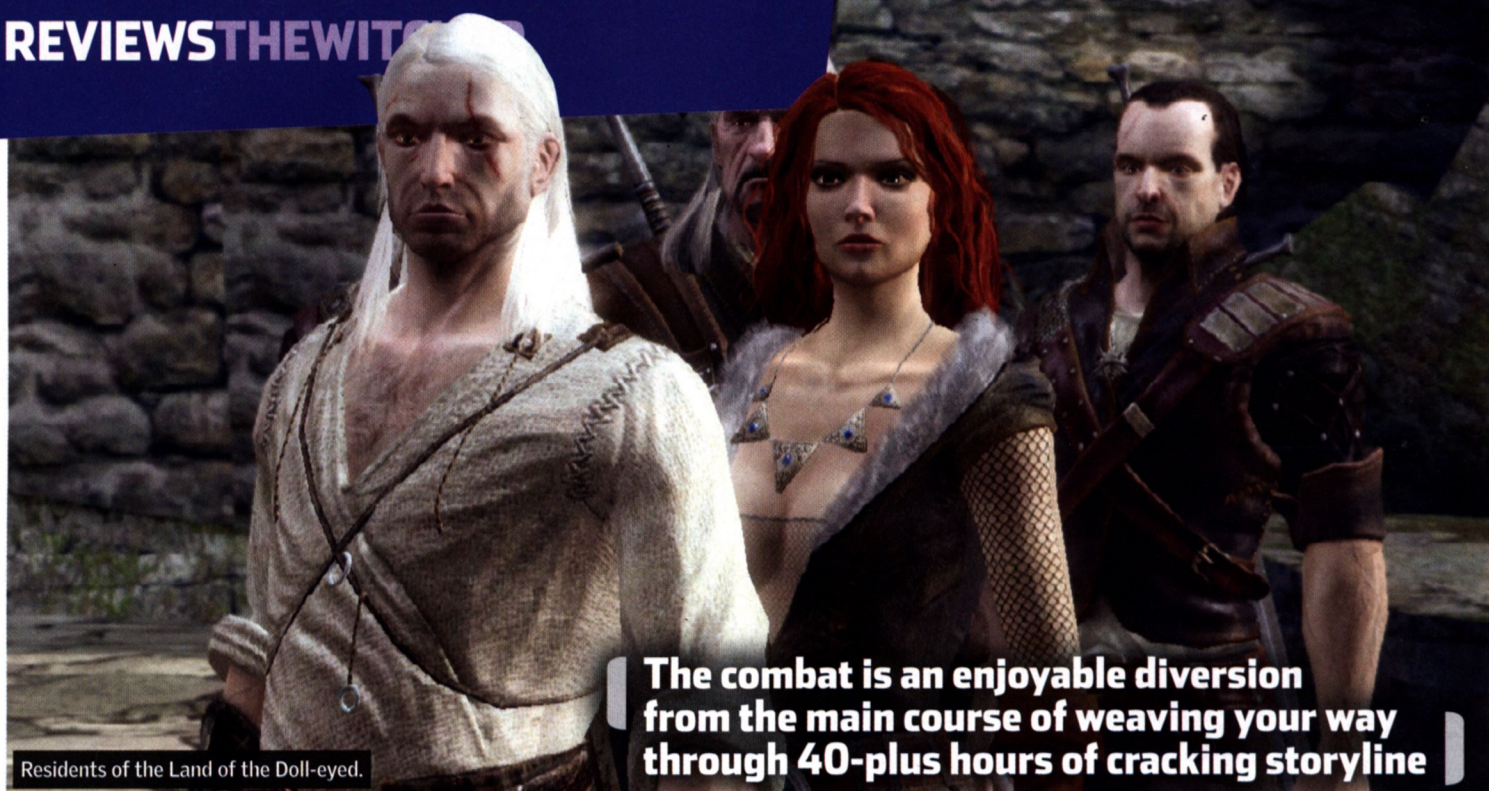
In this area, perhaps there is little that is startlingly original, but that doesn't detract from the essential fun of visiting new areas, slaying new monsters or meeting new characters. Yes it can get repetitive going from one area of the city to another to complete a mission, but then so was *Grand Theft Auto*, and so was *Oblivion*, and as with these games the world of *The Witcher* is one you always feel a part of and that alone compels you to explore every corner.

FIGHT NIGHT

Much has been made of the game's combat system, which allows you to chain together attacks, so long as



Pub fight, Witcher-style.



Residents of the Land of the Doll-eyed.

The combat is an enjoyable diversion from the main course of weaving your way through 40-plus hours of cracking storyline

Home grown

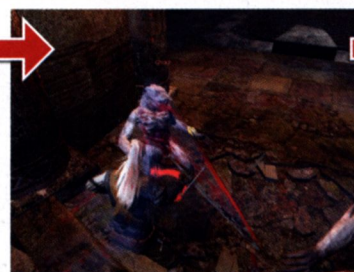
There's plenty to pick up from corpses and behind barrels, but your inventory will mostly be made up of food and materials to make potions, oils and other mixtures.



Get the Herbalism skill so you can recognise herbs growing wild – but you'll need to read the right books to recognise plants that will be of use.



Potions usually require strong booze as a base and the final concoction can have irreversible affects. Too many potions at once can prove toxic.



Later you can take ingredients from dead animals and fats are the basis for oils you can rub onto your blade to help against certain creatures.



When your alchemy book is full, you'll be getting ingredients to make bombs. Have you ever seen a dwarven suicide bomber... well you might soon enough.



Pub chat, *Witcher*-style.

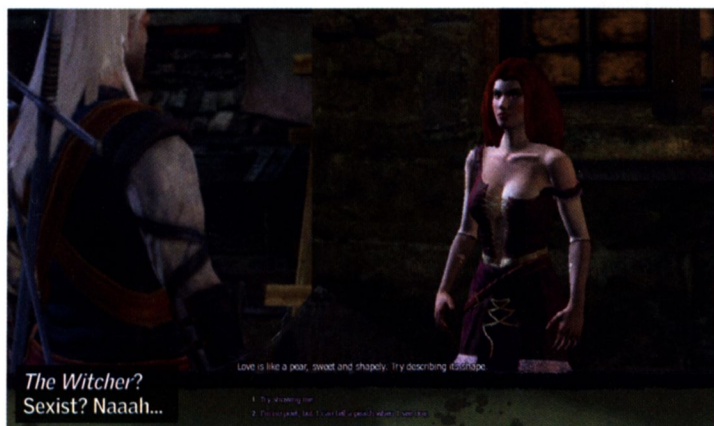
you time your mouse-clicks correctly. In fact, at higher experience levels you can link together enough leaps and devastating blows to secure an honorary degree from the Jedi Academy. In practise, whilst the combat isn't quite as dumb as your usual action-based RPG, it's no *Street Fighter II*. But the combat is an enjoyable diversion

from the main course of weaving your way through 40-plus hours of cracking storyline.

If I had to gripe about anything it would be that in open areas the illusion of freedom is diminished somewhat by impassable fences that in reality would splinter on a windy day. There is far too much repetition of character avatars as well, with some NPCs looking identical, even in the same areas of the game. Other problems are more ones of personal taste.

I found the supposedly tactical zoomed out view to be overly-cumbersome considering you control only one character – the over-the-shoulder view is just so much more immersive. And finally, the world of *The Witcher* is primarily a man's one, and whilst there are female characters with strong roles, they are primarily there to be conquered sex-wise or otherwise.

To be fair though, it's something of a novelty to have room available in a list of negatives to be able to castigate a game's misogynist overtones – because in every other department *The Witcher* is an intelligent, adult and thoroughly compelling adventure. **PCZ**



The Witcher?
Sexist? Naaah...

Love is like a pear, sweet and shapely. In describing it, I hope.

1. It's a lovely one.
2. The concept, but I don't agree with the execution.

PCZONE

Graphics Detailed and diverse
Sound Aural sex
Multiplayer For Siamese twins only

- ✓ Beautifully realised world
- ✓ Strong characters, epic story
- ✓ Unique character development options
- ✓ Decisions can bite you in the ass
- ✗ Combat is visual rather than tactical
- ✗ A mite sexist

88

Compelling and unique

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"DILEMMA" DOESN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE IT.

MASS EFFECT

Saren's forces are spreading. And their goal is clear: the extermination of all organic life. How do you decide who to save? Who to let perish? Life and death decisions await at every stop as you scour a vast universe of distant systems and uncharted planets. Don't forget your map. xbox.com/masseffect



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AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE ASIAN DYNASTIES

Gambatte Colby-san!



DEVELOPER Big Huge Games/
Ensemble Studios
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.ageofempires3.com/asiandynasties
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

Minimum system requirements:
1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card.

WHILE THE expansion pack for *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* is just a visual rehash of the original, *The Asian Dynasties (TAD)* shows just how add-ons can be done, bursting with rich gaming pleasure and significantly enhancing the core *AOE III* engine.

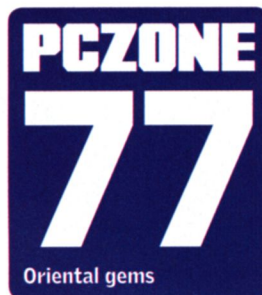
There's more going on than I usefully have room to list here, but the handover to a new development team (Big Huge Games in this case) has allowed the series to be treated

to a fresh, yet reverential, set of eyes, ears and hands. Thus Wonders make a return, spicing up your end game options, the clever deck system gets a few race-based twists that make you rethink their usage in a way best described as 'completely' and a hundred other smaller tweaks, tinkers and amendments make it play like an almost totally new game. Plus it still looks beautiful.

Excitingly for this old codger, *TAD* also sees a return to the 'stealth education' mode of the original *AOE*, providing as absorbing and interactive a history lesson as you could ask for. Play the game alongside an open Wikipedia browser, looking up the character and location names as you go, and you'll see the developers have done a pretty accurate job of recreating events that shaped these three nations in the past.

TAD is pricey for an add-on pack, but if you can stomach the cost, there's plenty of succulent, meaty goodness to be had from *TAD*. Plus it will big up your brain, and that can't be a bad thing for a pony.

Paul Presley



COMMAND YOUR



Choose from three custom factions with unique units and technologies.



Command all of human history and beyond.



Battle across the globe in your quest for world domination

Coming 16th November 2007
EMPIREEARTH.COM
SIERRA.COM/UK

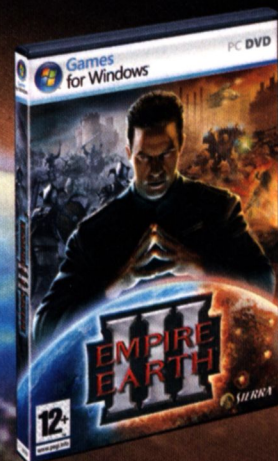


EMPIRE

CONQUER THE EARTH

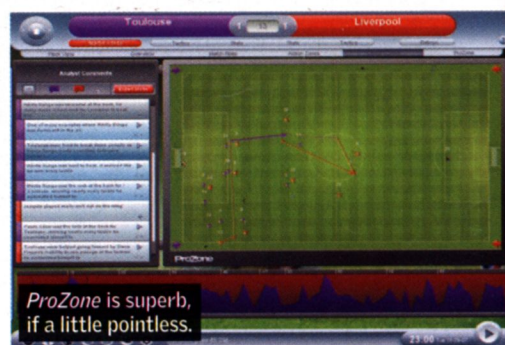


EMPIRE EARTH III



PC DVD
ROM

Games
for Windows



DEVELOPER Beautiful Game Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE
www.championshipmanager.co.uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

An enjoyable football management game likely to appeal most to those daunted by *Football Manager's* complexity.

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008

Can this year's *Championship Manager* challenge *Football Manager's* crown? **Martin Korda** assesses its title credentials

The *Championship Manager* healing process continues. However, while this year's version once again shows improvement, the game still feels as though the series is suffering from some kind of split-personality disorder.

On one hand, *CM08* is an accessible and entertaining football management game, requiring minimal tactical tweaking and allowing you to enjoy an experience free from overbearing micromanagement. It's also a game that's trying to compete with *Football Manager*, featuring an ever-expanding collection of leagues and a superb, hardcore match analysis tool called *ProZone*, which allows you to study games in exhaustive detail.

IDENTITY CRISIS

Despite its somewhat schizophrenic nature, *CM08* boasts plenty of quality. Additions worthy of particular praise include a formation overlay, which dynamically displays the opposition's tactical changes and the fluctuating confidence and fitness levels of your players during matches.

Navigation has been improved with some great new tooltips that provide a wealth of at-a-glance information, while

you can now simultaneously manage both a club and international team.

The transfer system has also been buffed, with more flexible negotiations perfectly complementing the existing Club Benefactor feature.

WE'VE GOT MOVEMENT

The match engine has been refined, and players now lean forward when running, jostle in the area, slide into tackles and launch themselves into heroic leaps and dives. As a highlights simulator, there's little to fault here. However, unfortunately, real-time matches still fall well short in terms of quality when compared to *Football Manager's* (see page 85).

CM08 is also a tad on the easy side and often requires minimal tactical tweaking in order to win matches, making the superb *ProZone* tool redundant. Other irks include underdeveloped team talks and player interaction options, a few too many high scoring matches and sudden, unexplained fluctuations in player fitness levels during a match.

Despite its flaws, *CM08* is easily BGS's best game to date and is a commendable step forward for the series. Fun and accessible, it provides a decent alternative to the complexities of *Football Manager*.

However, a weak tactical spine and the hit and miss match engine negate the need for any serious tactical tinkering, meaning that while its personality may be split, its mainstream characteristics still dominate its make-up. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Players now lean, slide and jump
Sound Atmospheric crowd noises
Multiplayer None

- ✓ The best *Championship Manager* of recent years
- ✓ Match engine looks better than ever
- ✓ Highly accessible
- ✗ Still struggles with real-time action
- ✗ Some annoying glitches
- ✗ A little too easy for experienced players

71
Getting there



Late drama at Meadow Lane.

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008

Steve Hill is back on the crack...

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive
PUBLISHER Sega Europe
WEBSITE
fm08.footballmanager.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

The annual world of football is given a facelift and a helping hand.

Minimum system requirements:
1.2GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and
a 32-bit display.

HOW IT STACKS

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008 **90%**

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007 **90%**

CHAMPIONSHIP
MANAGER 2008 **71%**

NOT CONTENT WITH breaking records, ruining relationships and shattering lives, this year Sports Interactive are hoping to ensnare even more hapless punters into their evil web of football-based addiction. Unbelievers have traditionally pointed to the irksomeness of the interface (not to mention the inherent pointlessness of the entire experience) as a stumbling block towards the football nirvana contained within.

This time round you're led by the hand thanks to the sinister-sounding Advisor, a pop-up box that explains how to do pretty much everything bar wipe the congealed drool off your keyboard. For the seasoned campaigner it's mainly a pain in the arse – although it can be told to go away, either for certain topics or for the entirety of your tenure.

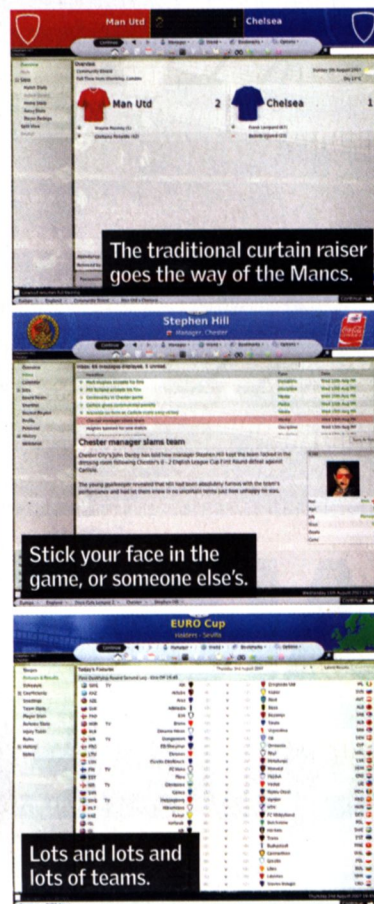
Ease of use appears to be the focus this year, with an in-game tutorial and a

sleekly redesigned interface awaiting the petrified novice. Once you're underway, the Match Flow system is simply a logical way of presenting the various screens in the build-up to kick off, ensuring that you know exactly who you're playing, along with tactics and the likelihood of them giving you a drubbing. Betting odds reflect the nation's obsession with gambling.

REALITY CHECK

As for the meat of the game, some pleasing tweaks become apparent in time, and you don't need me to tell you that no matter how hard you try to resist the game's seemingly transparent charms, it rapidly becomes paralytically addictive, turning you into a liar and a sloth.

It also plays havoc with your concept of real football. During the course of this review, a report came up on Sky Sports News that a scan on my striker's ankle revealed only bruising, causing my heart



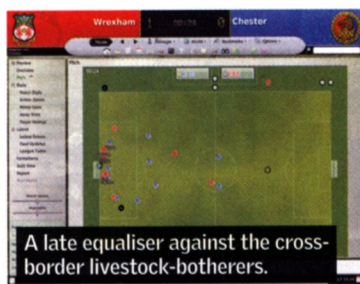
The traditional curtain raiser goes the way of the Mancs.

Stick your face in the game, or someone else's.

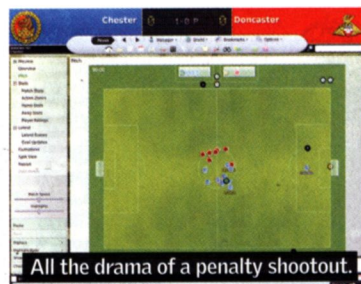
Lots and lots and lots of teams.

to momentarily lift for my FM team before realising that I should actually be pleased for my real team.

The uncanny knack of mirroring real life is testament to the massive infrastructure of international scouts that provides the player database, allied to the witchcraft that goes on under the bonnet. Despite this year's lick of white paint, it's never going to win any prizes for looks, something of an irrelevance given that it's a game that largely exists in the imagination. **PCZ**



A late equaliser against the cross-border livestock-botherers.



All the drama of a penalty shootout.

PCZONE

Graphics Rudimentary
Sound Weak crowd noise
Multiplayer Definitely

- ✓ Thoroughly absorbing
- ✓ Eerily realistic
- ✓ User-friendly
- ✗ Inevitable patches
- ✗ Makes you angry

90

A screensaver for the mind



ARMED ASSAULT: QUEEN'S GAMBIT

The battle may be won, but as *Martin Korda* discovers, the war is far from over

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive
PUBLISHER 505 Games
WEBSITE
[www.armedassault.com/
queensgambit.html](http://www.armedassault.com/queensgambit.html)
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99



AT A GLANCE...

Expansion pack to *Armed Assault*, which features two varied campaigns and two multiplayer levels.

Minimum system requirements: 2.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 256MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0).

HOW IT STACKS

ARMED ASSAULT 84%
**GHOST RECON ADVANCED
WARFIGHTER 2** 80%
**ARMED ASSAULT:
QUEEN'S GAMBIT** 70%

WHEN *ARMED ASSAULT* finally emerged from the foliage earlier this year after its protracted development, it proved more than worth the wait. Despite a collection of irritating bugs, it was an immense, freeform tactical shooter that lived up to the heritage of *Operation Flashpoint*. If you've been hankering for more of the same, then this expansion pack's two diverse campaigns will be just what you've been looking for.

The Rahmadi campaign sees you and a handful of troops tracking down the remnants of the SLA army after its defeat in the original game. Only problem is, the swines have regrouped and are now readying a counterattack, which you must stymie with some firecrackers and two packets of dental floss. Or at least, that's how it feels as your outnumbered forces are beset on all sides by tanks and heavily armed enemy squads. While there are

only a handful of levels, each one is humongous, and extremely tough.

WHO'S QUEEN?

The Royal Flush campaign is the antithesis of Rahmadi. Slower, stealthier, larger and more character-driven, you play a member of a mercenary unit hired by South Sahriani's new queen to take care of some pesky insurgents. But all is not as it seems.

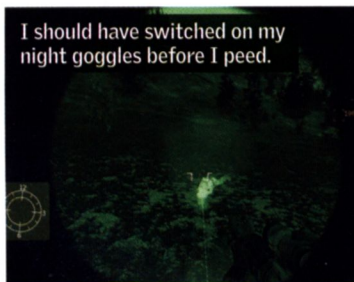
Royal Flush's gameplay requires a different approach to Rahmadi (such as hiding bodies to mask your presence) and you're sometimes presented with the choice of going it alone or using the whole team, which adds an extra challenge.

Now for the bad news. While there's plenty here to enjoy (including two excellent new multiplayer missions and a smattering of new weapons and vehicles), there's not a great deal of ambition. The missions, while entertaining and varied, are also a little similar to those

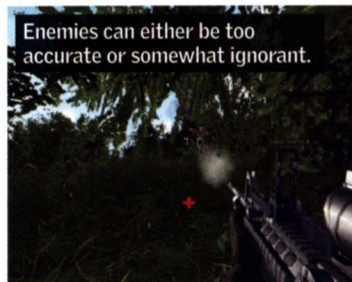
in *Armed Assault*. What's more, AI (both friendly and hostile) often proves irritatingly erratic and is either too accurate or just utterly ignorant.

Throw in a smattering of clumsy spelling and grammar errors and some ropey presentation, and you're left with a hit-and-miss product that'll no doubt satiate the hardcore, but probably prove a tad too irritating for the rest. **PCZ**

I should have switched on my night goggles before I peed.



Enemies can either be too accurate or somewhat ignorant.



PCZONE

Graphics **Not the best**
Sound **Believable and atmospheric**
Multiplayer **Two new missions**

- ✓ Two diverse campaigns
- ✓ Quality new multiplayer maps
- ✓ Some new weapons and vehicles
- ✗ Team and enemy AI leave a lot to be desired
- ✗ Not a great deal of ambition

70

Same again



RED OCEAN

The return of the duff 'bad man shooter'

DEVELOPER Collision Studios
PUBLISHER DTP Entertainment
WEBSITE www.redocean-game.de
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

Min system req:

1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.



HANG ON A minute – I've just got to get in character. Ahem. "The name's Hard. Jack Hard. I think I'm some sort of fisherman who's accidentally got caught up in a net of violence, but quite frankly it's hard to tell. The bad men all live in corridors: long corridors that lie deep beneath the sea. It's up to me to shoot them all when they rush out of their bit of corridor and into mine. And I'll do it too – one bad man at a time."

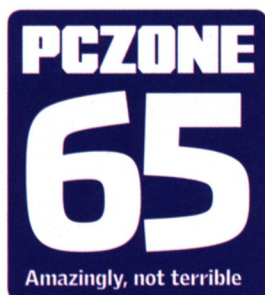
Red Ocean is in many ways a terrible game. It's horribly broken in places and archaic in structure, but is just so low-brow and so resolutely stupid that it somehow breaks the barrier and becomes really quite charming. You get to love its repeated AI barks (one of which is, somewhat bizarrely, "Mummy!"), and even the gravity becomes simply hilarious.

When you shoot someone they skid along the floor for metres at a time and occasionally end up in insane positions – say with their heads endlessly bobbing up and down on their crotch, with a left leg cocked casually over their right shoulder (resembling a yogi attempting to fellate himself).

What lets you revel in the game's inadequacies rather than become intensely irritated are the guns – all of which are well-balanced and let you pull off satisfying headshots. It plays like the unwanted bastard child of *Far Cry*'s interior sections, and not entirely in a bad way.

Still – I'd never actually recommend anyone to buy the damn thing. Think twice before hurling it back in the face of a loved one if you get given it though.

Will Porter



GOLD EDITION

ARMA

ARMED ASSAULT



"Ball-gripping gameplay"

ign.com

"Something akin to the Second Coming"

PC Format

"Bigger and better than Flashpoint"

PC Zone





HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V: TRIBES OF THE EAST

Orcs-a-lordy!

DEVELOPER Nival Interactive
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE mightandmagic.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
1.5GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.



TOTE DOESN'T REALLY add anything spectacular to the *HOMM* experience other than an acronym that reminds me of bags and the option of playing through a storyline with orcs, beasties and the types of creatures you're usually fighting against in these sorts of things.

Don't get me wrong, I love *HOMM* (all numerals), but this is a review of a standalone expansion pack for the fifth and is thus being judged on what it brings to the party. So while the base game remains the same – the undercurrent of fun and addictive tactical play is still ever present – that can't be chalked up to anything *TOTE* itself offers. The much trumpeted 'orc-play' merely adds a blood rage

factor to the mix that acts as a sort of extra shield for your orc army from time to time, but it's not a deal-breaker and the fact is this is an expansion in purely the most literal terms.

Hardened addicts who live online in multiplayer matches will no doubt be eager to snap up the new abilities, heroes and creatures to further pwn the n00bs, but for the rest of us sane mortals, all it does is provide a new bunch of maps and a new selection of graphics to play with. It does nothing to expand upon the base game and therefore make itself worthy of notice, except for those of you with a burning desire to see how a sub-par fantasy story turns out who can't be bothered to look it up on Wikipedia.

Paul Presley



PCZONE
58
HOMM's great. This isn't



EUROPEAN STREET RACING

A croissant and a bullet to the head please....



DEVELOPER Xider Games
PUBLISHER Team 6 Game Studios
WEBSITE www.xider-games.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

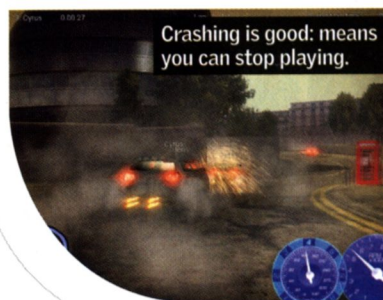


RACING CARS IS a pure adrenaline rush. Hearing the revs of the engine, feeling the g-force push you to one side as you power out of corners and trying hard to stop grinning like a schoolboy who's just got a glimpse of his first porn mag... it's thrilling stuff. And thanks to next-gen technology in games, now everybody can experience that feeling. Without having to sell your gran for the insurance policy either.

Well... in most cases, anyway. If I was feeling generous, I'd comment that there's very little to recommend in *ERS*. But, unfortunately, the drinks machine's run out of Lucozade, so here goes. The cars are a bunch of blatantly ripped off real world

vehicles with the odd tweak here and there to make sure they get past the legal department, the menus and options are so basic they make Paris Hilton seem like a quantum physicist, the graphics look like they've been put together by a bunch of incompetent pig farmers, the handling of the cars feels more like driving an over-sized Scalextric vehicle, and the physics system obviously has more in common with the laws of Oliver Reed than Newton. Oh, and the 'street racing' of the name simply consists of made-up roads with well-known sights dotted about. The PC's answer to *Project Gotham Racing* it certainly isn't. Unless, of course, the question was 'how shit can a driving game be?'

Suzy Wallace



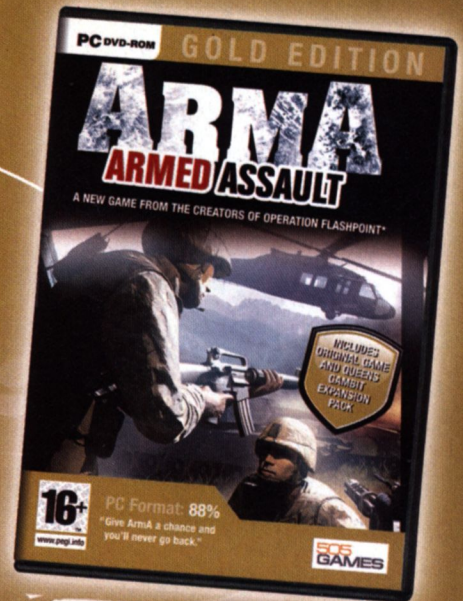
PCZONE
11
A write off

GOLD EDITION

ARMA

ARMED ASSAULT

A NEW GAME FROM THE CREATORS OF OPERATION FLASHPOINT*



NOVEMBER 07

A SUREFIRE HIT!

INCLUDES
ORIGINAL GAME
AND QUEENS
GAMBIT
EXPANSION
PACK



www.armedassault.com



**Bohemia
Interactive**

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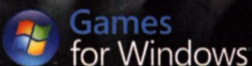
HELL NO!

THEY TOOK OUR FRIENDS. THEY TOOK OUR HOMES.
THEY DESTROYED EVERYTHING WE LOVED.
BUT WE WILL NEVER LET THEM TAKE LONDON. EVER.

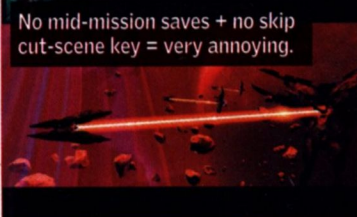


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It does have a certain X factor about it.

No mid-mission saves + no skip cut-scene key = very annoying.

What, no cup holder?!

TARR CHRONICLES

It's space! With spaceships in! **Richie Shoemaker** prepares for launch

DEVELOPER Quazar Studios
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE www.quazar-studio.com/tarr
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



THE DAYS WHEN the likes of *Elite*, *X-Wing* and *Wing Commander* were commanding high chart positions are long gone, but that hasn't stopped a steady stream of developers from buffing up the dented fuselage of the once-proud space combat genre. The latest are Russian codeshop Quazar, who have attempted to reassert the premise of *Star Trek: Voyager*, resuscitate the mission-based shootfest that was *FreeSpace*, and infuse the whole lot with some modern-era *Battlestar Galactica* credibility.

As is typical of the genre, you pretty much spend most of your time trying to line up red circles with your crosshairs, a process consisting of some high-speed dashes across space, speed matching, lots of shooting, then a quick stab of the key that finds a new target. It works though because not only are the backdrops lovely,

but space is littered with enough wrecks, asteroids, debris, stations and detritus, that battles feel much more vibrant and dynamic than they actually are.

IN TRANSLATION LOST

In no way would you call *Tarr Chronicles* a simulation. Indeed, apart from a few ship customisation options there really isn't much to do apart from aim and shoot. The only other real challenge is to decipher some of the dialogue. To be fair, the script is more amusing than it is abysmal, but also distracting enough to assert the fact that *Tarr Chronicles* is series of action sequences strung together with cut-scenes more than it is a sweeping science-fiction adventure.

Perhaps the story would be better told if you didn't have to sit through cutscenes every time you had to restart a mission. Another easily-fixed issue is the omission

of separate volume sliders for music and sound – you have to endure the sub-BSG tribal drumming and gibberish chanting, made more grating as it changes tempo in obvious ways.

Which is a shame because *Tarr Chronicles* is one of the better looking space games to appear. The arcade-style combat is fast-paced and there are enough ship customisation options for those rainy hangar days. Those not expecting too much, who may be pining for an uncomplicated spin through familiar territory will certainly enjoy *Tarr Chronicles*, but it's no substitute for replaying the utterly fantastic and cheap, *FreeSpace 2*. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Space has never looked busier
 Sound Well recorded, badly implemented
 Multiplayer Only room for one

- ✓ Looks pretty
- ✓ Smooth and fast combat
- ✗ Lacks depth
- ✗ Music implementation is terrible
- ✗ Unskippable cutscenes

60
 Falls short of the stars

AT A GLANCE...

Outnumbered, outgunned and far from home amongst unfriendly aliens. It's shooty spaceship time!

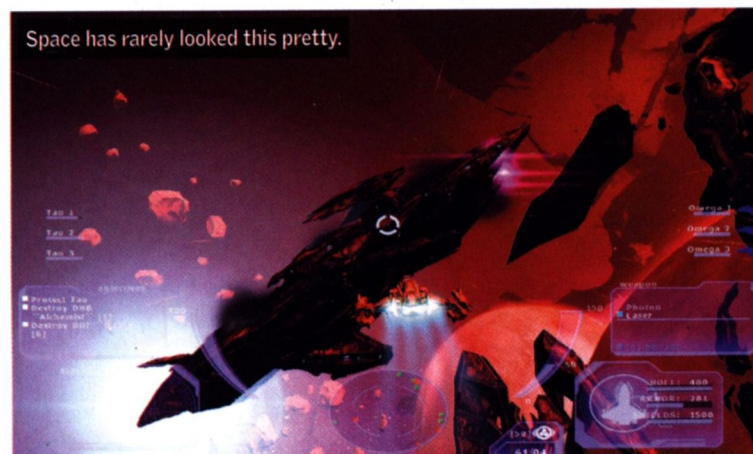
Minimum system requirements: 2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

Freespace 2 **85%**

Darkstar One **66%**

Tarr Chronicles **60%**



Space has rarely looked this pretty.



"One wyvern I can handle. Just so long as none sneak up behind... oh."



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER



Dan Griliopoulos finds nibbling on souls a real cheer-up

DEVELOPER Obsidian
Entertainment
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE
www.atari.com/nwn2/
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

A much-needed ending to the plot of the RPG classic, with a nasty twist, lots of new stuff and it's much harder too.

Minimum system requirements: 2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0).

HOW IT STACKS

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2	86%
NWN: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE	85%
NWN 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER	81%

FINALLY, AFTER ITS buggy release last year, Obsidian have fixed *NWN2*'s initial faults. Therefore it's irritating that installing this expansion removes all voice and text from *NWN2* and *MOTB*, and the auto updater can't help. There is a hotfix available from the *NWN2* forums – not much good if you're not online though. This means, after *Knights of the Old Republic II*, Obsidian's rep as the bodge-job masters of PC RPGs is secure.

Save for the initial problems, *Mask of the Betrayer* is a mammoth old-fashioned expansion, featuring new races, new equipment and a new plot. Surprisingly, there's also a mechanic fixing a gameplay issue from *Baldur's Gate*: resting. If you rest in any D&D game, you immediately regain all your health, magic and spells, which makes the game easy. *Mask of the Betrayer* has solved that in two ways.

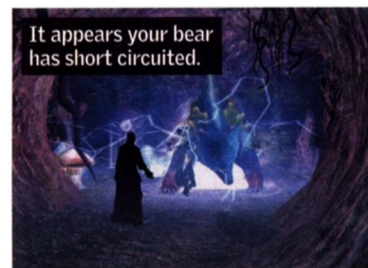
Firstly it starts at level 18, meaning you're facing the hardest enemies in the world, like erinyes and greater shadows. Secondly, there's a new mechanic/twist – you play the same character as in *NWN2*, who begins the game bereft of the Gith shard that was embedded in his chest. This literal void has been filled by you becoming a spirit eater – a kind of ectoplasm-sucking vampire.

If you rest too much, your anima reserve runs down and you suffer, eventually dying. However, you get rewarded with new powers the more souls you munch. This means suddenly you have to conserve your spells and the game becomes a real challenge, as well as an ethical dilemma.

SNACKING ON SOULS

Beyond treating everyone you encounter as an ethereal buffet, *MOTB* introduces new playable races, most importantly the genasi, powerful planetouched half-elementals. There are also two new base classes: the Spirit Shaman (an anti-spirit specialist druid) and the Favoured Soul (a warlock with divine spells and deity-specific weapon skills). Then there's five new Prestige classes: Arcane Scholar, Invisible Blade, the villainous Red Wizards, Sacred Fists and Storm Lords. You'll certainly get to use one of these during the expansion.

The game looks better as well, and they've played with the interface so you can now play it like an RTS (queuing up orders, etc) or *World of Warcraft* (with a restrictive behind-the-shoulder cam). All in all, this is a rather well-thought out expansion; Obsidian's release of a broken game is the only betrayal. **PCZ**



It appears your bear has short circuited.

PCZONE

Graphics Lovely, especially in the shadow world
Sound Acceptable
backgrounds and passable acting
Multiplayer 1-4 co-op

- ✓ Great value
- ✓ Eating souls is fun!
- ✓ High-level enemies are very tough
- ✓ Lots of extras
- ✗ High recommended specs
- ✗ Bollocked-up patching

81

No need of a mask

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

IndieZone



Martin Korda gorges himself on another feast of indie gaming goodness

BARNSTORMING

DEVELOPER Defacto Games WEBSITE www.defactogames.com PRICE \$9.99 (£5)

ONE OF THE best side-scrolling shooters we've seen in some time, *Barnstorming* is packed full of excellent gameplay and some genuinely funny humour.

You play Beano, the pilot of a small biplane tasked with thwarting the dastardly plans of an evil mastermind called Dr Weevil. What follows is an entertaining series of increasingly taxing

missions in which you must shoot planes, blimps, tanks and a variety of bosses while avoiding the incessant barrage of projectiles hurled at you and dodging buildings and trees.

Barnstorming's pace is slower than many of its counterparts, but levels teem with bonuses and foes. Attempting to deal with everything on screen is a serious challenge and while bosses can be samey, many are incredibly quirky and humorous.

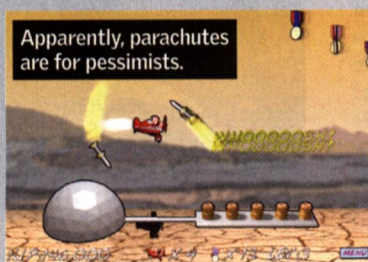
Multiplayer is also a hoot – there are two-on-one PC and eight-player network play options – and there are plenty of weapons and power-ups to help you through the 12 (plus one bonus) fun, if slightly samey, levels. At just £5, it's a steal.

INDIE ZONE
GAME OF THE MONTH

Enemies up, down and all around.



Apparently, parachutes are for pessimists.



PCZONE
71

ARRRRRRR!

DEVELOPER Mind Control WEBSITE www.mind-control.com/arr PRICE \$9.99 (£5)

ARRRRR ME HEARTIES, this be a salty sea farin' adventure of ship scuttlin' and bountiful booty huntin', so set sail and load yer cannons for a voyage through 10 games that'd have even ol' Davey Jones reachin' for his bottle o' grog and exclaimin', "By the powers!" in delight.

Shout "Shiver me timbers!" as ye master the wind in yer sales and steer yer ship with controls so fine ye'd think 'em straight from Fiddlers Green.

Holler, "Ahoy" as ye and yer buccaneers broadside privateers and unload yer furrer's cannons into the swaggies.

Then loot their booty and set sail for home to drop off yer plunder, score points

and hunker down for a mug of ale and a parrot pie.

If AI landlubbers not be for ye, then challenge three fellow salty buccaneers with four mice in one monstrous machine, then beat 'em biscuit eaters to each port, loot their booty and shout, "Yo, ho, ho" as ye send 'em to Davey Jones's locker with a blinding broadside blast.

But warned be ye, *Arrrrrrr!* be a whole chest o' fun, but it ain't as hearty as a case o' rum and a wench's rump that ye be takin' o' with a paddlin' oar.

PCZONE
69



OUT OF YOUR MIND

DEVELOPER Gamelab WEBSITE www.gamelab.com PRICE £12.99

OUT OF YOUR Mind is an ingenious and original puzzle game that sees you flossing the gunk out of people's brains to make them more mentally stable. This gunk is caused by pesky cells called Naga-Tics, which dance around brains before exploding into goo.

The general premise is to draw a line through these tics (which come in a variety of colours) and then loop the line to the correspondingly coloured tic trap. However, there's a catch. When you complete each loop, you're not allowed to have any loose tics within its boundaries. Throw in some stringent

time limits and you're posed with plenty of cerebral conundrums, with later levels proving so vexing you'll be reaching for the dental floss and forcing it through your ear hole with a snooker cue to clear your very own cranial blockage (Patronising Government Health Warning: Don't force snooker cues through your ear hole!).

Had there been a little more variety here, then *Out of Your Mind* could well have been this month's top game, but as it is, it'll just have to settle for third.

PCZONE
66



BLOOM

DEV Elephant Games WEB www.elephant-games.com PRICE £10.39



HERE'S ONE FOR all you horticultural enthusiasts who love to sit in your greenhouses completing crosswords and Sudoku puzzles while playing Mozart to your geraniums and lovingly whispering sweet nothings into their soft petals.

Bloom is a simple yet entertaining puzzle game in which you must connect rotating pipes in order to channel a stream of water to as many plants as possible. The more water each one receives, the more quickly it'll grow. Gather enough flowers before your water supplies run out and you win the level. It really is that simple,

and shouldn't overly challenge any Sudoku adept.

The green fingered amongst you may also appreciate the nuggets of flower info that precede levels and the ability to upgrade your greenhouse and garden, though this feature seems to have little or no effect on the gameplay.

If you're looking for a challenge, my advice is to opt for *Out of Your Mind*, but if it's a casual distraction you're looking for this flower fest may just be the perfect tonic.

PCZONE
60

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



ROBOBLITZ
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed Issue 177

This stunning third-person action puzzler about a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates is the highest-scoring *Indie Zone* game we've ever had. Packed full of physics-based puzzles, excellent combat and jaw-dropping visuals thanks to *Unreal Engine 3*, you simply can't allow yourself to ignore this gem.



NAKED WAR

www.zee-3.com | Reviewed Issue 177

A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played over email in which your team of four soldiers must kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.



MORNING'S WRATH

www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed Issue 163

A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



NEW STAR SOCCER 3

www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed Issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensible Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie-gaming footy experience available.



MR ROBOT

www.moonpod.com | Reviewed Issue 181

Like an isometric *Roboblitz* with zany RPG-style combat. You play a robot who must bring a malfunctioning starship back online. Packed with puzzles, great characters and humour.

BUDGET

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

We look at how much bang you can get for your buck. Or should that be pound...

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

PUBLISHER: Steam WEBSITE: www.steampowered.com PRICE: \$29.95 (£15)

AS A **PC ZONE** exclusive review earlier this year, *STALKER: SOC* kicked off 2007 in style, with one of the most awesome settings for a shooter ever.

Over six years in the making, *STALKER* is a semi-freeform shooter based around the irradiated

wastelands of the Ukraine's famous nuclear reactor, as you follow a loose (and a bit crap) storyline while joining in unscripted and random firefights against AI-controlled Stalkers, military forces, and the strange mutated creatures that live in the nuclear disaster zone.

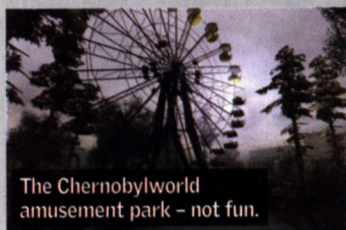
The interface is unwieldy in places, and the side missions feel a bit jemmied in, but *STALKER* has an array of fantastic weaponry, and a wonderful feeling that you don't get much in modern games – surprise. You never quite know what's around the next corner – whether it's a Stalker fighting a pack of wild dogs, or a strange anomaly that can burn you to death in seconds or a frightening new mutant leaping out of the shadows. *STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl* is often genuinely original, daring and insanely great.

Jamie Sefton

**PCZONE
84**



Time to wet your pants.



The Chernobylworld amusement park – not fun.



The ever-popular squid-head thing.



"What? No marshmallows?"



"Don't be so nervous comrades. That really *is* just a tree."

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Richard hiring a new artist for a graphic novel he's written – *Syndrome*:

Saving: about £3,000!

Suzy staying with the boyfriend's parents on holiday:

Saving: £300

Will re-discovering the 'going off' section of Tesco:

Saving: currently £1.34



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR – GOLD EDITION

PUBLISHER: Steam WEBSITE: www.steampowered.com PRICE: \$19.95 (£10)

BETWEEN FLOATING WEIGHTLESS in space (*Homeworld* series) and exploderising Nazis into tiny chunks (*Company of Heroes*), Relic brought us the excellent *Dawn of War*.

Drawing on the rich futuristic fantasy world of *Warhammer 40,000* (and making many a fanboy's dream come true), *DOW* was an RTS packed with some excellently animated units, visceral combat and non-stop action. The latter mostly being thanks to a reliance on capturing strategic points on the battlefield, thus forcing the player out of their fortress and into the thick of things.

In this *Gold Edition* are the *Winter Assault* expansion, which adds the Imperial Guard faction (who rely on



Necron – no relation to Skeletor.

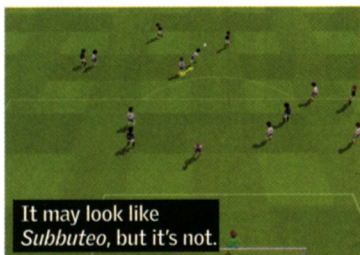
superior numbers and tanks) and two new single-player campaigns. You can also pick up the *Dark Crusade* expansion for the same price. If you've never watched a Dreadnought pick up an Ork, spin him around and rip him into tiny pieces, then you've got to give it a go.

Suzy Wallace

**PCZONE
80**



It's the 'toon army!



It may look like Subbuteo, but it's not.



Cel-shading and big heads. Great.

SENSIBLE SOCCER 2006

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: www.mastertronic.com PRICE: £4.99

ANYONE WHO HAD an Atari ST or Amiga back in '92 played *Sensible Soccer* – it was the best footy game by miles (anyone who says it was *Kick Off 2* should leave the room immediately, or things really will kick off).

Top-down camera, after-shot swerve and lift of the ball by whichever way you moved the joystick, plus miniature comedy players that you could name as

your friends and family – *Sensible Soccer* was brilliant. My mum in goal! It was hilarious. Honest.

Sensible Soccer 2006 is last year's remixed version, overseen by Master Sensi himself Jon Hare, featuring new cel-shaded graphics, but the same top-down, no-faffing-about football silliness.

This is what you used to call "pure arcade action" – fast and simplistic but

an absolute riot in two-player, although you have to plug in an extra joypad as, scandalously, there is no online multiplayer mode.

PES 2008 is the best PC football game out there. But for a fiver, *Sensible Soccer 2006* is a cheap laugh. Just bring along a mate.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE
72

DEUS EX COLLECTION

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

YOU CAN GET the original *Deus Ex* on Steam for what equates as a little over a fiver, and it can be found on a spinny rack in a shop (next to typing tutors and games called things like "Thatz my Dogz!") for a crisp bluish note as well.

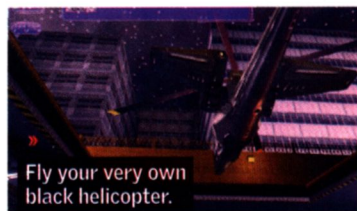
So should Denton virgins jump into bed with the Steam deal that opens access to both groundbreaking role-playing game monolith and semi-shoddy Xbox-appealing sequel for the dollar equivalent of a tenner? I'd say yes, purely because after completing the original game there's an undoubted thirst for more of the *Deus Ex* universe – a setting where every conspiracy theory you can think of is real.

Personally, I reckon they should have tied *Project: Snowblind* (the unofficial *Deus Ex* shooter) into the deal to make it truly worthwhile for aficionados.

But without the weight of expectation attached, *Invisible War* certainly isn't a terrible outing. And its bedfellow remains the greatest PC game of all time.

Come back soon JC, we miss you.

Will Porter



Fly your very own black helicopter.



CCTV: perfect for voyeurs.

PCZONE
80

And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



SPACEFORCE: ROGUE UNIVERSE
\$29.95 (€15), STEAM

Deep in the furthest reaches of space lurks a pretender to X3's crown. It's got some flashy visuals, dramatic explosions and plenty to do and see. However, the lack of polish, absence of tutorial and hammy plot may make you scream.

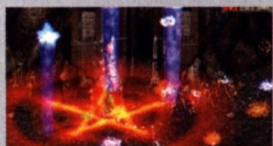
PCZONE
64



ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOUR
\$24.95 (€13), STEAM

An arcade flying title that's so easy you could make a cuppa at the same time and still be a top gun. There's a surprising amount of content in the dual American/Japanese campaigns but the game's easiness overrides the fun to be had.

PCZONE
55



BEYOND DIVINITY
£9.99, XPLOSIIV

An old-school, in-depth RPG this may be, today it may as well be from another dimension. Its detailed skill system and engaging characters are marred by simplistic combat and graphics that have aged about as well as Elizabeth Taylor.

PCZONE
47

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1 **HALF-LIFE 2**

\$19.95 (€10), STEAM

Do we really need to explain why you need Gordon's physics-based outing? For a tenner? OK then, it's PC gaming at its finest. Happy now?



2 **FAR CRY**

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI. The only real rival to the FPS dominance of *Half-Life 2*.



3 **COMPANY OF HEROES**

\$29.95 (€15), STEAM

Relic's title made the WWII RTS into an enjoyable genre again, with an excellent campaign and taut, tactical gameplay.



4 **THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND**

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

The precursor to *Oblivion*, Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG offers cheap goblin bashing.



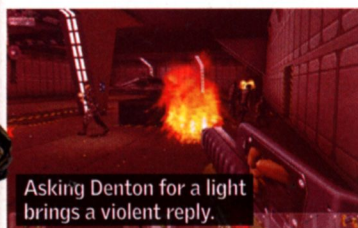
5 **PSYCHONAUTS**

\$19.95 (€9.99), STEAM

Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this title into the stratosphere of platformers.



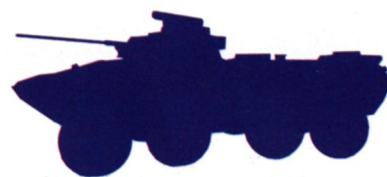
Look – everyone's so pointy!



Asking Denton for a light brings a violent reply.

BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'T'

- 1 **TOMB RAIDER**
(ISSUE 45)
- 2 **TIE FIGHTER**
(ISSUE 18)
- 3 **TOTAL ANNIHILATION**
(ISSUE 56)
- 4 **THEME HOSPITAL**
(ISSUE 49)
- 5 **THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT**
(ISSUE 72)



PCZONE TOP 5 LIVE ANIMALS IN GAMES

- 1 **CHICKENS**
(FABLE - ISSUE 160)
- 2 **WILD PIGS**
(FAR CRY - ISSUE 140)
- 3 **SEAGULLS**
(HALF-LIFE 2 - ISSUE 148)
- 4 **BEES**
(BIOSHOCK - ISSUE 185)
- 5 **SHARK**
(HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY - ISSUE 169)



PCZONE TOP 5 DEAD ANIMALS IN GAMES

- 1 **COW**
(CALL OF DUTY - ISSUE 136)
- 2 **HORSE**
(BROTHERS IN ARMS - ISSUE 161)
- 3 **DOG**
(BIOSHOCK - ISSUE 185)
- 4 **PIG CREATURE ON A SPIT**
(STALKER - ISSUE 179)
- 5 **BIRDS**
(CONDEMNED - ISSUE 168)



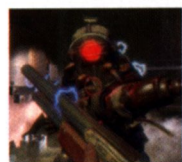
Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2
PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to deliver. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%

The spiritual sequel to *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat makes this an unmissable experience.



BATTLEFIELD 2
PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the ability to zap people with medic shock pads.



FAR CRY
PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



TEAM FORTRESS 2
PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%

Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's updating of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together everything that's good about online shooters and topping it all off with some superb animation to rival Pixar's films.



HL2: EPISODE ONE
PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep. One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire series. It may be short, but it's also warm, funny and thrilling, and the first five minutes are pure gold.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%

Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect brain-nuzzling puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and out of walls sounds odd, but games are rarely more delightful.

Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* hails from that most over-populated of genres - the WWII RTS - yet is still number one, is testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good.



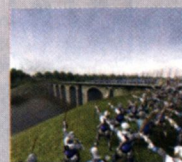
WORLD IN CONFLICT
PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%

A stunning RTS set at the height of the Cold War. It offers truly innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you're ever likely to see.



CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy thanks to the expansion packs.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Now complemented by the excellent *Kingdoms* expansion.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Massive battles and armies composed of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most unique RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS
PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the pinnacle of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY
PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spys vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES
PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



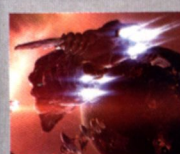
EVERQUEST II

PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW's* *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



LOTR ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect representation of Tolkien's stories, with solid combat and engaging plots, all bound up in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! The whole of Middle-earth awaits...

Simulation

BUDGET



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER

PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC

PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GT2

PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GT* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED

PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT

PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
The rallying legend returns and this time he's joined by a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC so far.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pinging though.

God games

BUDGET



THE MOVIES

PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2

PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
While it might not strictly be a god game, *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from functional robots to saucy ragdoll jpegs. Try it out and see for yourself.



EVIL GENIUS

PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport

Must buy!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007

PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%
Konami's arcade kick about is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07

PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



NHL 06

PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this *06* incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.

Role-playing games

Must buy!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of Lightsabers to keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

PCZ Issue: 176 - 86%
An identical twin to *NWN* but using modern technology, *NWN2* has all the gleeful D&D levelling we love, plus tons of modding opportunities. If you have a beard, this is for you.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

November/December

BEOWULF
BLACKSITE
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008
CRYSIS
EMPIRE EARTH III
F.E.A.R. PERSEUS MANDATE
GEARS OF WAR
HELLGATE: LONDON
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN
NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET
SAM & MAX SEASON TWO
SIMCITY SOCIETIES
SUPREME COMMANDER: FORGED ALLIANCE
TABULA RASA
UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

UBISOFT
MIDWAY
ACTIVISION
MICROSOFT
EA
VIVENDI GAMES
VIVENDI GAMES
MICROSOFT
EA
EIDOS
EA
TELLTALE GAMES
EA
THQ
NCSOFT
MIDWAY

Early 2008

A VAMPIRE STORY
ALONE IN THE DARK
ASSASSIN'S CREED
BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY
FAR CRY 2
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
LEFT 4 DEAD
LEGENDARY - THE BOX
LOST: THE VIDEO GAME
SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL
SPACE SIEGE
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION
THE CLUB
TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY
UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT
VIVA PIÑATA

ASCARON
ATARI
UBISOFT
UBISOFT
UBISOFT
THQ
VALVE
GAMECOCK
UBISOFT
ASCARON
SEGA
UBISOFT
SEGA
CODEMASTERS
SEGA
MICROSOFT

Get your business ready

Order now!

**£50 Off
Hosting!***



Great gift ideas

Toby's Christmas ideas

Fantastic Christmas recipe and gift ideas!

Do you have a tight budget this Christmas and do not know what to buy a friend, son, family member or a friend?

I was in the same situation last year and came up with this fantastic idea...

I will show you how to make perfect personalised hampers that will impress everyone. If you do not see a recipe, then please do not hesitate to contact us and we will email you what you are looking for.

If you do not have time to make your own personalised hamper then drop us an email with your requirements and delivery details and we will deliver a native Christmas.

Good luck and seasons greetings.

Our Christmas-Shop

Candles	1215 80888 1236	£3.49
Christmas-Teddies	1215 80888 1235	£3.00
Cosmo's Santa	1215 80888 1234	£7.49
Light band	1215 80888 1232	£6.00

Touch of class



BEAUTYSHOP

Soap with Honey



02602-11340

£2.25

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Soap with Milk



02602-12311

£3.25

add to cart

Strong almond combined with a warm oatmeal milk and honey scent is what this soap smells of. We helped this scent along with the addition of freshly



for Christmas!

Having a strong presence on the web is key to most organisations today. At 1&1 we specialise in bringing you the finest tools available to make your business a success. We have put together a range of fantastic offers on Business Hosting Packages, .com Domains, Servers and we are launching our new powerful eShops in time with this Christmas ecommerce. 1&1 provide all the tools you need to make your profits go through the roof!

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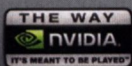


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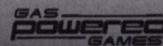


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THE INVASION BEGINS NOVEMBER 2007



Games for Windows



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SUPREMECOMMANDER.COM

A big decision

FOR THE LAST couple of months, my Dell workstation has been giving me subtle clues that it's on its way out. It needs power-cycling twice before it'll boot, presents me with weird errors in the syslog, and most importantly, my friends now beat me in *Team Fortress*. Yes, the machine's 3.6GHz Pentium 4 has become an ageing Schwarzenegger and lost all its awesomeness.

Mind you, the machine has been left on 24/7 for three years now, so I feel the technology has given me more than my money's worth. I've already replaced one of the HDDs, have lost my temper with the optical drive, but because I'm obsessive about disk housekeeping (which is more than can be said about my house housekeeping) XP remains stable and responsive.

And I'm dreading replacing it. Though the OS has never been reformatted, reinstalled, or otherwise shored up, I need to be working from a clean slate for my next three-year stint and I'll not be cloning the disk. That means dusting down my old XP CD-ROM for another go around, or moving to Vista.

My colleagues cover their mouths and snicker when I fold my arms, roll my eyes and act like their grumpy uncle, but my PC is a platform not just for gaming but also for endless testing, development and general poking about – and for that XP is the obvious choice.

I went for Vista. Wish me luck.

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

FEARSOME THREESOME

PC boards that can use three or more graphics cards are here

WONDERING WHY CROSSFIRE and SLI feel unfinished? Both AMD and NVIDIA have been working flat out creating brand-new multi-GPU solutions, and probably haven't had the time to iron out its existing flaws.

Take a look at MSI's brand-new K9A2 Platinum. It sports an entirely new CrossFire configuration with an eye-opening quad PCIe setup spanning two x16 and two x8 slots – that's two-card, three-card and even four-card gaming arrangements.

The technology that combines the power of three or more Radeons is called CrossFire X and it's with us now.

AMD claim the performance gain over a system with a single x16 graphics card is 180 per cent for two GPUs, 260 per cent for three and 300 per cent or more for four.

NVIDIA have also been creating their new three-way driver for a launch later this month, dubbed SLI-III.

You'll need to have an nForce 680i SLI or 780a/780i SLI capable motherboard with three empty x16 PCIe slots, three 8800 Ultra/GTX cards all with dual SLI connectors, and a new three-way bridge piece to sit astride them.

The word 'expensive' doesn't quite cover it, does it?



Two x16 and two x8 PCIe slots allow three- and four-card CrossFire.

RAY OF LIGHT

Interactive ray tracing may be the death knell of graphics as we know

AN INTEL STRATEGIST has suggested that multi-core processors are getting so good, you soon won't need a graphics card.

Currently, GPUs create game scenes using a technique called rasterising because it's fast and effective. Intel's argument is that while rasterising makes sense today, ray tracing gives more realistic pictures and processors are getting powerful enough to create it in real time.

Systems with the eight-plus processing cores required to dynamically construct a ray traced version of *Quake IV* are here, although the man at Intel seems to ignore the way raster techniques and image quality have improved over recent years. blogs.intel.com/research

Ray tracing's strength lies in its realism.



Rasterized

Ray traced

NEWS ROUND-UP

The Dutch consumers' association, Consumentenbond has recently advised its clog-wearing computer buyers to avoid Vista. Having being inundated with more than 5,000 complaints relating to the latest version of Windows, the outfit suggests people ask for XP or even consider switching to Apples and Mac OS X or the Linux variant Ubuntu. consumentenbond.nl

The recent T3 Gadget Awards saw the iPod being voted The Best Gadget Of All Time, despite being little more than a slimmed-down, fashion-conscious version of its genuinely groundbreaking predecessor, the Walkman. Wonder what'll get The Best Gadget Of All Time next year? apple.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY JON BLYTH

K9A2: An experimental pop band whose failure could largely be credited to the fact it was just a dog and a large piece of paper. **RAZER DIAMONDBACK:** An '80s wrestler whose signature move was to drop to his haunches and sniff the air, before spraying a foul scent onto his opponent and enthusiastically attempting to molest him. **SUPERWOOFER:** A word that was used in precisely none of the reviews of K9A2's debut single, *Traffic Attack*. **RAY TRACING:** After Ray Charles objected to the constant brass rubbings being taken of his face, he requested that a less intrusive method of gaining an imprint of his likeness be used. The result was also used to render ultra-realistic teapots. **7.1 SURROUND:** A bullying tactic where seven people surround one person, and point at him.

SURROUND POUND

Are you missing anything but not going for 5.1 or even 7.1 surround? Not really. While it's true that hunkering down inside a squadron of front, rear and centre speakers does create a more immersive sound, dropping to 2.1 won't ruin your gaming. It's still possible to work out where sounds are coming from, and the atmosphere is more down to the skill and imagination of the developer than how much you've spent on speakers.



Z-4

Z-4 PRICE £49 **MANUFACTURER** Logitech **WEBSITE** logitech.co.uk

THE Z-4 IS a premium quality system with a muscular sound that's great for games, but less than ideal for music and movies.

This setup's biggest problem is its subwoofer, which is a hydrogen bomb compared to the Altec Lansing's well-aimed artillery. Unless you turn it down, or adjust the graphic in your media player, it overwhelms the top half of the sound and

leaves you wallowing in a sort of baritone soup. Powerful? Yes. Controlled? Not really.

It also has a tendency to boom, making it terrific fun for action games – explosions rattle the glass in next door's windows – but rather unrewarding for watching TV or kicking back with some chilled trance mixes. Where the VS2421s are capable of making the low notes seem like gentle kicks to each kidney, the Z-4s make the same music seem

like a helicopter is circling overhead. That said, the two satellite speakers do give a very bright, very clear sound, and are much more engaging than the Altec-Lansing's. They're a more fashionable design and will look dated by Christmas, but looks are unlikely to be of concern to anyone spending £49 on speakers that are essentially a high-power gaming enhancement.

PCZONE
Z-4
85



VS2421

VS2421 PRICE £44 **MANUFACTURER** Altec Lansing **WEBSITE** www.alteclansing.co.uk

THERE'S LITTLE DOUBT that this Altec Lansing 2.1 set offers you the deepest, cleanest low notes for your money.

It's just a shame that the VS2421's two satellites sound rather average in comparison – a hollow counterpart to the solidity of that magnificent sub. You need to

push the treble dial round to maximum and have the volume knob nudging migraine before the experience starts to feel in any way gratifying.

But perhaps I'm being too harsh here. Despite a comparatively weedy 28W RMS, the set is plenty loud enough for home use, works well with music, films and games, and

Loud enough for home use, works well with music, films and games

at £40 costs less than a six-month *World of Warcraft* subscription – not that any discerning Hardware reader would be party to that sort of life-squandering folly.

The remote is also nicely chunky, as is the fashion these days, and has a power switch, a usefully large rotary volume knob, together with treble/bass adjust, headphone and auxiliary inputs, plus an integrated microphone.

I can't wrap up without mentioning the VS2421's woofer again. Although it's a rather diminutive reflex-type enclosure, it features an integrated power supply and the 5.25in flaps about unhindered, meaning you not only have the joy of air going up your trouser leg but can watch Altec Lansing's logo bounce to the bass line. If only the pair above it were brighter.

PCZONE
VS2421
85

KANJI

PRICE £1,599 MANUFACTURER Chillblast WEBSITE chillblast.com

WE'VE HAD A run on high-performance gaming rigs, but I remain impressed at how much grunt you get for your groats these days.

This new Chillblast offering is named for Kanji, one of the fashion designers at Japanese clothing outfit Evisu and the man responsible for the unique case design. I should point out that his artwork is a £600 optional extra (it knocks up the price to around £2,100), so if you're not taken with the juxtaposition of samurai warriors, skeletons and *Doctor Who* monsters in what appear to be fishnet stockings, don't tick the box. However, I should confess to preferring the Kanji design's glossy background to the stark aluminium of a standard Lian Li PC-V1000 case – white looks genuinely cool these days.

Thankfully, the Kanji isn't all mouth and no trousers. Its Q6700 Intel chip runs at 3.30GHz, up from the factory standard 2.66GHz, and the GeForce which accompanies it has no performance equal. It is – how shall I put this – vigorously quick and yet remarkably quiet.

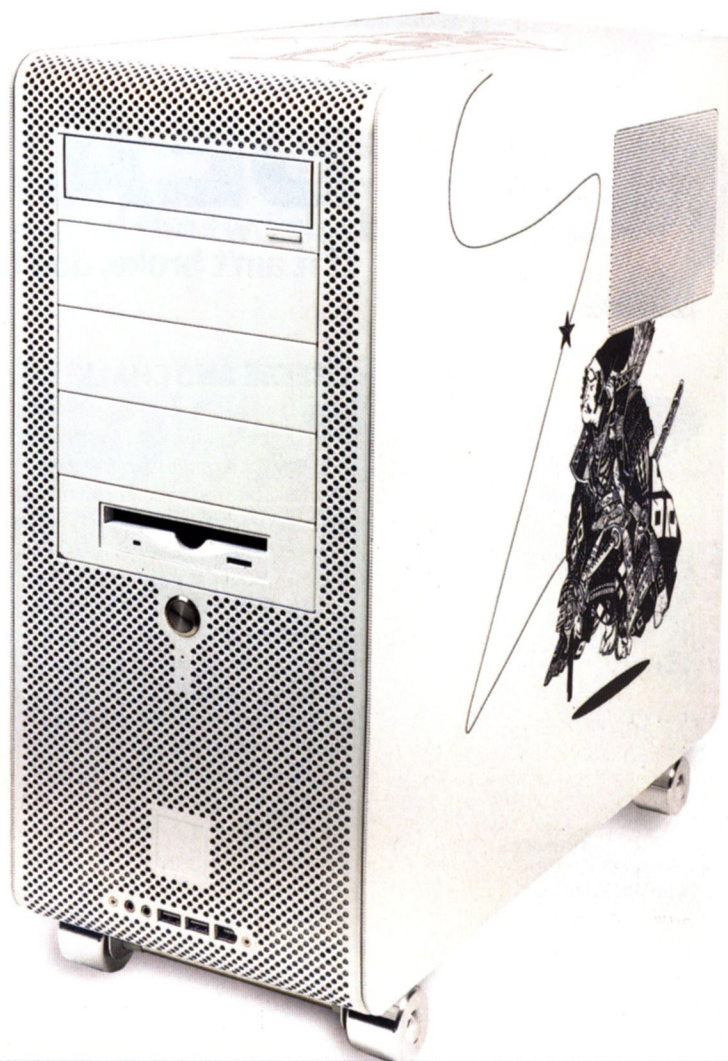
Chillblast tell me that they've tested the higher clock speeds endlessly and have had no trouble. They also claim the P5K is the optimal platform for this sort of rig (incidentally, the P5K is also in CyberPower's excellent Gamer Infinity 870 – reviewed in issue 187, 88%).

Given that their experience with 680i has proven it to be a bit hot and troublesome with the 4GB Vista needs, and that SLI configurations can be unrewarding anyway.

SPECIFICATION

Lian Li PC-V1000 (customised); 850W Thermaltake Toughpower; ASUS P5K Deluxe Wi-Fi Edition; Intel Core 2 Quad Q6700 at 3300MHz+ (overclocked); 4GB memory GeForce 8800 Ultra; 768MB 750GB Hitachi Deskstar (configurable); 20x Samsung Native SATA DVD-RW; Windows Vista Home Premium; Two year collect-and-return warranty; Lifetime phone support.

PCZONE
90



DIAMONDBACK 3G

PRICE £3799 MANUFACTURER Razer WEBSITE powerdrive-computers.com

ANOTHER FINE RAZER rodent, now updated. The '3G' in the Diamondback's name refers to the third-generation infrared optics borrowed from its cousin the DeathAdder (issue 179, 89%).

As with the DeathAdder, the new Diamondback is light, accurate, and a real delight to use when shooting people down their internet. It's a symmetrical design, making it suitable for both right- and wrong-handed gamers, and is also shorter and narrower than many rivals – its non-slip surface and slippery feet help it feel like a part of you.

Be warned that if you have large hands, you'll find your fingers jumping back and forth like some demented spider when you need to switch quickly between front and side clickers or to reach the scrollwheel. However, like the Krait (issue 185, 82%), the Diamondback is comfortable for day-long desktop use once you've learned to rest your hand further back than at first seems natural.



PCZONE
89

EN8600GT TOP

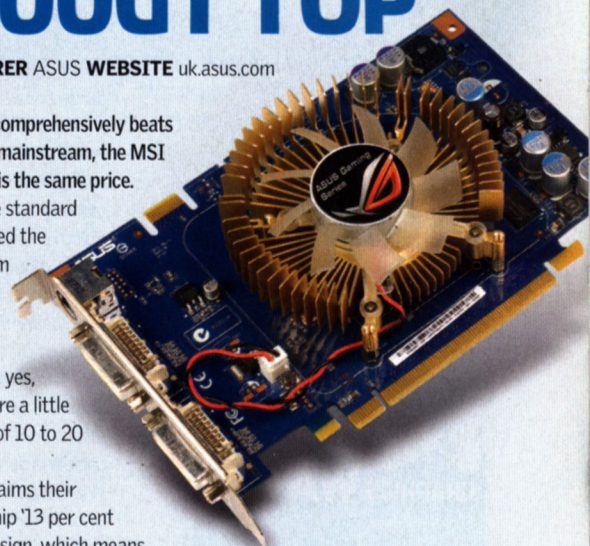
PRICE £99 MANUFACTURER ASUS WEBSITE uk.asus.com

THE EN8600GT TOP comprehensively beats our current favourite mainstream, the MSI RX2600XT – and yet is the same price.

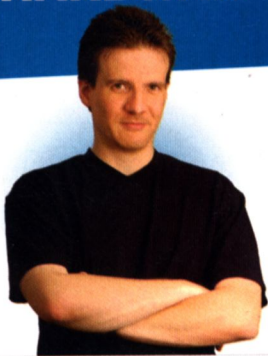
ASUS have upgraded the standard GT's memory and have pushed the stream processor clocks from 1,188MHz to 1,458MHz – hence the rather bold claim the card is '40 per cent quicker'. It's running quicker, yes, but the performance gains are a little more modest – in the order of 10 to 20 per cent.

The manufacturer also claims their redesigned HSF keeps the chip '13 per cent cooler' than the reference design, which means very little – those of you buying factory tweaked cards with a view to pushing them even harder should be sectioned. Go and spend £20 more on an EN8600GTS instead.

With the RX2600XT results in brackets, the EN8600GT TOP is capable of 17,297 (15,872) points in *Supreme Commander*, 214.68 (191.31)fps in *Source* and 5,651 (4,454) marks in *3DMark06*. Our new best buy!



PCZONE
91



Problems?

We've all got them, you know... Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite green-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *WOW* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.



Wandy's supertip: Don't use ice cream to cool your CPU.

DRIVER WATCH

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 79	10 SEPT 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 162.18	26 JULY 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 163.69	18 SEPT 07
	FOR VISTA	

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 2.09.0007	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA	30 MAY 07
	2.15.000	
CREATIVE	AUDIGY AUDIGY 2	9 OCT 06
	AUDIGY 4.2.09.0016	
CREATIVE	AUDIGY FOR VISTA	16 MAR 07
	2.12.0002	

DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

CHEESE AND CHALK

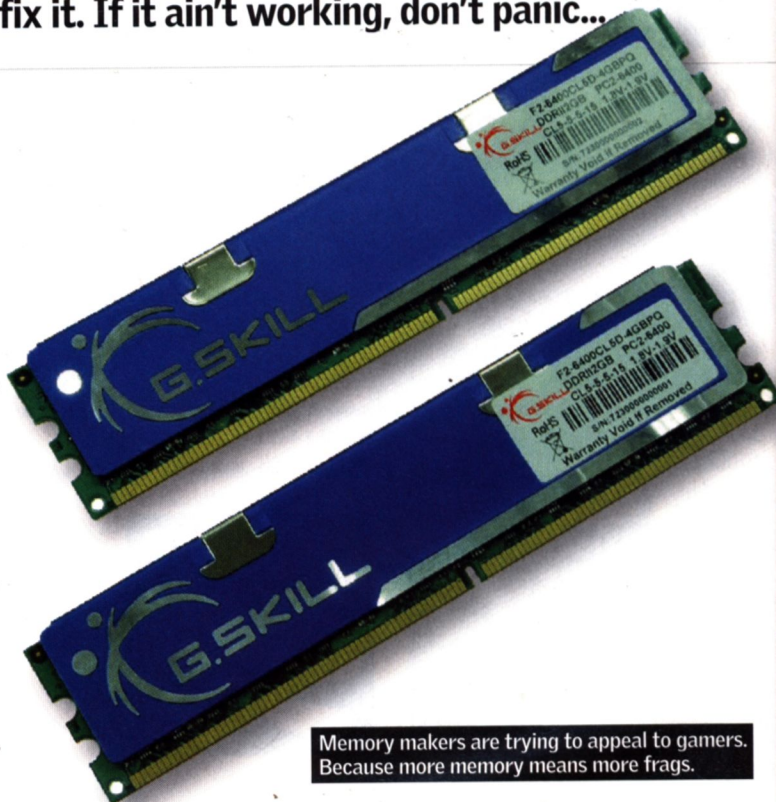
Q It seemed like a great idea to install XP on the same disk as Vista (issue 184, *How To... Learn To Love Windows Vista*) and I've tried twice. I reach the point when the system reboots for the first time after installing XP to a new partition, it then POSTs, but just as it's about to read from the CD little graphical errors appear like a purple block here and a tiny green one there. And then nothing happens. It just hangs. Putting in the Vista CD, it successfully gives me the option to repair – an option I've selected twice now.

I'm running an IP35 Pro, factory-clocked E6600, 2GB Corsair RAM, EVGA 8800 Ultra Superclocked and X-Fi Extreme Gamer, all with the very latest drivers. Any clues or extra steps that may help would be very much appreciated. I have to say, I did have my doubts that it would be quite as simple as it sounds on paper!

Rob Walter

A There's really very little that can go wrong putting XP on a machine that came with Vista installed, so long as you don't do something silly like install to one of the existing partitions, or use an ice cream cornet as a CPU cooler (I have to ask these things because these days people will do anything to be popular on YouTube). In essence, all you're doing is copying additional files to your hard drive, not radically altering the underlying technology. If you're all backed up there's nothing to worry about.

The only obvious hurdle is that the XP boot loader doesn't recognise Vista, meaning that after finishing you'll not be able to run the newer operating system. This isn't a problem as such; it simply means you'll need to put the Vista loader back in order to access both versions of Windows, and that's a two minute job. But since I'm often asked to better explain the entire process involved, next month's *How To* tutorial covers everything you need to know about putting XP on a Vista machine. As for your problem with graphical corruption and lock-up just after POST (that's a power on safe test for the uninitiated), you have to be looking at something that's wrong with the hardware, as there's no operating system – meaning no drivers and no applications – involved at



Memory makers are trying to appeal to gamers. Because more memory means more frags.

that point. That said, it foxes me why you'd be able to reboot and successfully repair Vista. That genuinely makes no sense. I can only suggest that you follow my advice in the upcoming *How To...* and visit the Dear Wandy forums if the same thing occurs.

MEMORISE THIS

Q I'm looking to buy a new PC. I'm a gamer at heart, but the PC will also be used as a home system for the wife and young kids to email, use the internet, help with schoolwork and so on.

I have a £900 budget but am thinking of spending £500 on a Core 2 Duo E4400, 512MB RAM, 80GB Hard Drive, 320MB 8800GTS and 17in E-Machine E17T4W-EU widescreen LCD.

I have two questions: first, will I see a massive difference if I choose to upgrade to 4GB PC2-6400, and second, would I be better off with the Core 2 Duo E6850 and DDR2-800 memory?

Stuart Wilson

A To answer your first question, you need a minimum of 2GB if you're going to run XP or Vista. However, your choice of memory type will depend on which processor you end up with – Intel's

Core chips prefer running synchronously with your memory.

In order that you fully understand what we're going to do here, you need to know that the number shown after a DDR2 product denotes the effective clock speed, and that the number after PC2 shows bandwidth – though why manufacturers use this to differentiate between memory packages is beyond me, given that bandwidth is beyond the comprehension of almost all their customers.

Anyway, if you can multiply your RAM's effective clock speed by a whole number and achieve your Core processor's front-side bus speed (see compare.intel.com for full details), you have essentially coordinated the two clock signals, and that's what you want to order. I know it sounds complicated, and will initially make your head hurt, but as long as you stick to this very simple rule you'll not go wrong.

In the case of the E4400, here we have an 800MHz bus chip that's ideally paired with DDR2-800 (ie PC2-6400) RAM.

In the case of the E6850, this is a processor with a higher 1333MHz bus that's matched by DDR2-667 (ie PC2-5300) RAM – and don't go getting hung up on the fact this particular memory appears to be slower than the memory for the

If you can multiply your RAM's effective clock speed by a whole number and achieve your Core processor's front-side bus speed, you have essentially co-ordinated the two clock signals

Wandy talks technical – he can't help himself.

E4400. The E6850 is not going to be throttled back behind the E4400.

And finally, to answer your second question – yes, you'll notice the difference in power between choosing the E6850 over the E4400. But like I've often said, you'll find that spending a little more on a decent screen will give you greater long-term enjoyment than trying to eke out a little extra power from under the hood.

All the processors you see available now will be antiques in two or three years, whereas your monitor will still do you proud for years to come.

PARTITION TRAGIC

Q My sister has a Fujitsu SCALEO P (3602XP) system. It has a single Samsung Spinpoint hard disk in it which is starting to fail. Twice the system has gone into a boot/bluescreen loop, and twice Spinrite has repaired the disk. I bought her a replacement Seagate Barracuda, put both disks in a different machine and used Partition Magic 8 to copy her boot disk to the new one. I tried to boot off the new disk and the BIOS recognised it, but then saw: "A disk read error occurred. Press CTRL ALT DEL to restart". I tried again, booting from a CD and using Drive Image Pro 7, but ran into the same problem.

I can put the new disk in as a secondary drive, boot from the original, and read the new disk without problems. I can also put the new disk in my own machine and it'll boot. I've read elsewhere that some PC manufacturers embed chips into their motherboards which ensure that the boot disk is from an approved supplier. Is that right? I'd appreciate any help or comments you can offer as I'm running out of ideas.

Mark

A Assuming you've configured Partition Magic and Drive Image to copy the master boot record along with the data, and that the clone

process completed in full and without errors, I'd guess that your problem lies either with drive letters or with BOOT.INI. In my experience using Acronis True Image, you can get into a great deal of pickle cloning XP partitions that are not assigned to drive C, such as when backing up the secondary install of a dual-boot XP system. You need to re-assign the drive letter before you clone, and for that you need to use a utility such as JustBoot Boot Corrector (\$1995 from justboot.us) or EASEUS Partition Table Doctor (\$39 from ptdd.com). In addition, check that the BOOT.INI doesn't point to old or invalid Windows installations.

However, it's intriguing that you're able to boot the disk from your own PC – it suggests that your sister's Scaleo has been the problem all along. Not only would this explain why it won't boot the newer drive, it would explain the errors you were getting originally. **PC7**

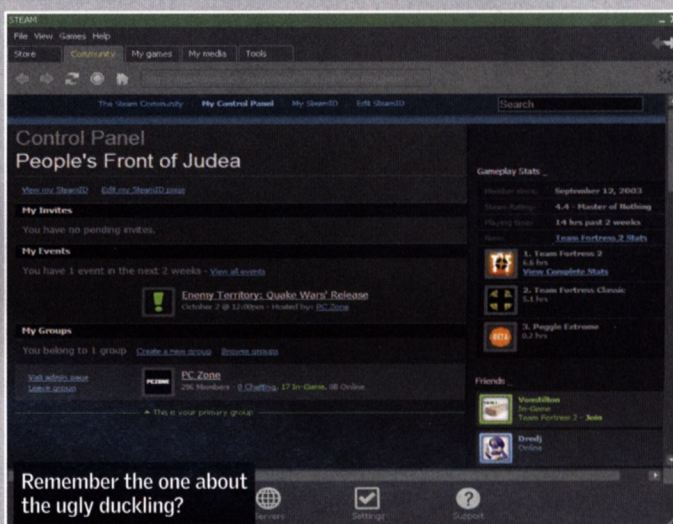
Mark's sister's Fujitsu's drive's partition is not working.



FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(tapleton) I'm having some "issues" with my ISP who say that I am exceeding my monthly download limit and are therefore charging me extra pennies. I need a tool that lets me monitor my activity so I can see how much I am downloading. Can anyone recommend something? (Fergal) Bandwidth Monitor Pro from www.bandwidthmonitorpro.com. There are some free ones, but I find free ones a little bit unreliable, some are too minimal, and some are overcrowded with reports and options. Bandwidth Monitor Pro seems to be accurate and has a simple history view where you can view usage by the Day, Week, Month, and Year.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



30 STEAM

COSTS FREE FROM steampowered.com

Five years ago, Valve unleashed this weird poo-coloured thing called Steam on a distrustful community. And after 18 months of connectivity issues, horrid bugs and threatening letters from your ISP, the community rolled its collective eyes and declared that while Steam was a lovely idea, it'd be super if we could all go back to buying boxes on shelves – oh, and where was bloody *Half-Life 2*?

Things are different today. We've all had our fix of Freeman, and not only has Steam turned rock-solid, but features which once seemed like tacked-on extras have become central to its broad appeal – and they're improved with every new release. For example, the Friends system actually works, and when

integrated with the Community it allows you to do all the things you wanted to do – hold chat sessions, arrange games, and even keep track of all those random people you meet and really get on with when playing. It slowly dawns on you that online gaming has been missing exactly what Steam is now providing.

There are still problems. Get three or more together for a LAN party, and everyone's updates work together to swamp the fattest broadband line; *Windows 98* nor *ME* are supported; Steam's atavistic look and feel clashes with *XP* and *Vista*, and anyone buying and downloading games through the system can't sell them on eBay once they grow tired of them – they're stuck with them until that asteroid hits.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or, has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

When buying products over the internet, under the Distance Selling Regulations you're entitled to several things



Any excuse to show the boys in their jim-jams again.

WATCHDOG



Bad companies need sorting – and good companies need praising...



THE ACCUSED: BT PROBLEM: Broadband not working

A short while ago, reader Clarke Meades decided to order a broadband package from the biggest supplier of them all – BT. He was told that he'd have to wait a week for the line to be activated and he took a day off work to await the arrival of his router. But as you can probably guess, it didn't turn up.

It eventually arrived a few days later but after installing it and setting everything up, Clarke found that he couldn't connect to the internet. BT carried out a line test but with no errors showing up, they're convinced that Clarke shouldn't be having any problems. After many lengthy phone calls with still no internet access, he got in contact to see if we could do anything to help out.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: Tormented by the thought of anyone having to survive without access to lolcat pictures for that long, we got straight on to BT. A week after our initial call, Clarke told us that BT had been in contact and that, eventually, his broadband had been activated.

BT themselves confirmed that the problem was "an underground line fault which took us a while to identify and rectify. We have apologised for the delay in dealing with it and have made a goodwill payment."

FINAL VERDICT: Broadband working and compensation received

Obviously, we don't get a chance to chase up every Watchdog complaint we're sent, so, as my farewell gift to you, I thought I'd pass on some handy hints that I've picked up over the years...

- Use a credit card for purchases over £100. Under the Consumer Credit Act, the credit card company is equally liable for any defects that arise. So should there be any problems, you may be able to claim your money back from the credit card company. Please note though that this only applies to individual items or services worth over £100. If you bought two (or more) items with a total value of over £100, you wouldn't be covered.
- When buying products over the internet (or by phone or mail order),

Slow to activate line but compensation was paid.

Products & Services | Your account | Support & advice | What's new

Home phone services | Broadband & Internet | Mobile | Entertainment | Security | BT Shop | BT Credit Card

BT Total Broadband
The UK's most complete broadband

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From only **£8.95** per month

under the Distance Selling Regulations you're entitled to several things: clear information about the goods or services before buying; goods must be delivered within 30 days unless otherwise agreed; and, importantly, you're entitled to a cooling off period of seven days. During this time (which begins from the day you receive the product), you may cancel the order without a reason and return the product for a full refund. Lastly, once you've informed the company you wish to cancel the order, all money must be refunded to you within 30 days of cancelling.

■ If you cancel an order after receiving the products, you must return them to the supplier. Unless otherwise stated in the seller's terms and conditions, you don't have to pay for returning them but you must make them available for collection by the company. And you don't have to pay to return faulty goods.

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■ Use reputable sellers. The internet makes it easy for small companies to spring up, take your money and disappear. Check to make sure they have a postal address and telephone number that you can contact them at.

■ Make sure you read the small print in any contract that you sign. By purchasing goods or services from somewhere, you're agreeing to their terms and conditions, so make sure you know what you're agreeing to!

■ If you ever need any advice, call Consumer Direct on 08454 040506 or go to their website at www.consumerdirect.gov.uk for consumer advice. Or send an email to watchdog@pczone.co.uk for help from my successor: **PCZ**



SAINTS NOT SINNERS



For many years I've owned a portable 80GB Iomega hard drive which has proved invaluable at work as I transfer large files and people's music collections between machines (legally, I might add, before some music company tries to sue me). But after returning from a few days holiday, the power cable was nowhere to be seen and, without it, the hard drive is just a doorstop.

After unsuccessfully hunting about for the cable online, I contacted Iomega. The lovely people there

quickly got back to me, informing me that there were none in stock but that they'd send one out as soon as some arrived. Weeks passed and with no power cable in sight, I decided to contact them again.

There was still no power cable in stock so they decided that I'd waited long enough and instead sent me a brand new hard drive which was not only dinky enough to fit into a pocket but was also twice the capacity at 160GB. Hurrah for the lovely chaps and chapesses at Iomega!

REMEMBER:
SPEAKERS ARE NO
GOOD IF YOU'VE
GOT NO EARS

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Here at **PC ZONE** we love many things: beer, kebabs, cake, nipples... Oh, and shiny new kit!

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £370

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

AMD have arrived! And the Radeon they brought along is nice enough, but it's neither faster or slower than the 8800 GTS, so our favourite GTX keeps hogging the top spot. Yes, we could have put the Ultra here, but it's over £500 and not much faster. Even we're not that stupid.

PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

EXPECT TO PAY

£630

MAN Intel

WEBSITE intel.co.uk

Faster than its predecessor and any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme CPU has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache, and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, it has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY

£155

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.co.uk

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY

£149

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



SM226BW

EXPECT TO PAY

£219

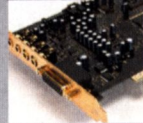
MANUFACTURER

Samsung

WEBSITE samsung.com/uk

The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast – just 2ms grey to grey – and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks, making it ideal for any kind of game.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY

£130

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY

£195

MANUFACTURER

Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

EN8600GT TOP

EXPECT TO PAY £99

MANUFACTURER ASUS

WEBSITE asus.com

ASUS have upgraded the standard EN8600GT's memory and have pushed the stream processor clocks from 1,188MHz to 1,458MHz to give us a card that's between 10-20 per cent faster than standard models and noticeably faster than the 2600 XT. Budget mainstream cards don't get better than this.

PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY

£105

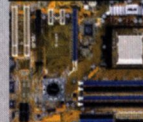
MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.co.uk

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing speed for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROE EX-FIRE ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY

£60

MANUFACTURER

ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support.

HDD



CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for *Windows* to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY

£118

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19in screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the 1440 x 900 panel of its VA1912w sibling.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

£20

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY

£35

MANUFACTURER

Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.



Some may claim to be a 'Gem' in the gaming crown, but you'll see that XFX is the only true diamond. Synonymous with speed, performance and top status, XFX deliver the best gaming and video experience to your screen.

Supporting all the latest innovative technologies such as, DirectX 10 and NVIDIA's PureVideo, you can enjoy the latest games and video's to the Max.

Combine our graphics power with an XFX motherboard and we will take you to "the next level" After all... XFX works best on XFX!



THE TRUE GEM

True Hardware for DX10 gaming



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Tel: 0870 7554747



www.dabs.com



www.ebuyer.com

www.XFXforce.com

**PCZONE**

FREEPLAY



Born free, as free as the wind blows

FREE GAMES!

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

Awwww!

MY DOGGED PURSUITS of free stuff recently led me to an awards ceremony. You may not believe it, having read the kind of shit I come out with, but I got nominated for "Writer On A Specialist Magazine", an award which could aptly be retitled "Niche Tit No-One In The Real World's Heard Of".

Ignoring the award, which I promptly and rightfully failed to win, I'd focused my attentions on the free bar. It's a sad fact that videogame journalists don't get bribed. God knows, I've tried to implement a system whereby publishers wanting to boost their scores fill my safety deposit box with Elizabeth Duke jewellery and Tesco Club Points, but if there's corruption in this industry, I'm seeing none of the benefits. So, a free bar sponsored by all the big games companies gave me the chance to hit those bastards in the pocket.

I won't dwell for too long on the details. Basically, I told Steve I liked him – drunken gusher that I am – before plucking the award from the winner's hands, sticking it down my trousers, and launching my pissed self down a flight of stairs, to the delight of two burlesque dancers.

I may have made it sound like all these events happened at the same time to add to the sense of drama, but hey – I'm telling a story, not reading the news. The point is, too much free stuff can drive a man insane. In this respect, it's exactly like love, drugs, and prolonged physical trauma.

So, just watch it with the free stuff, right? Play safe.

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, staff writer



112 Demo pages

Free gaming slices to whet you up or put you off



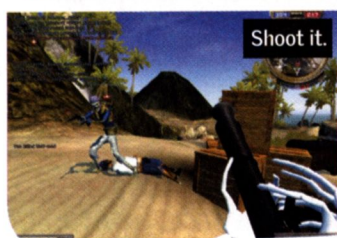
114 News

Some of the less tedious stuff that's happened since last month



116 Freeware

It's on the disc. Whether you like it or not, you own this stuff now



118 Freeplay

Highlights from the back-end of gaming



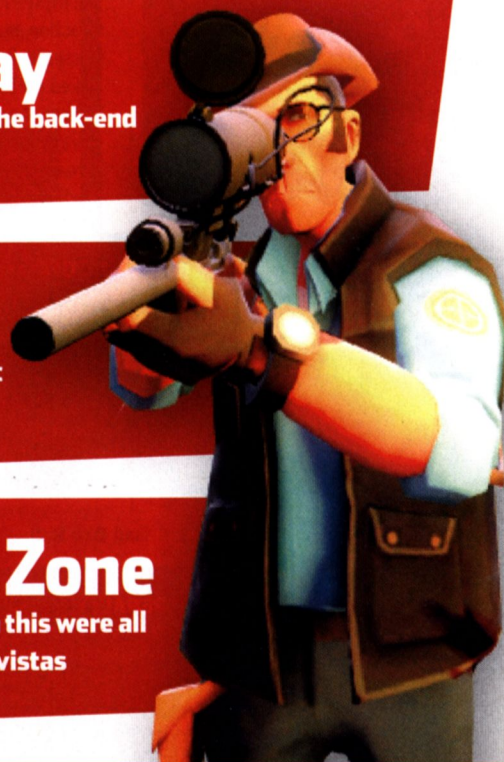
119 Mods

C&C: Like a music factory of death



120 Online Zone

I remember when this were all Mosaics and Altavistas



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

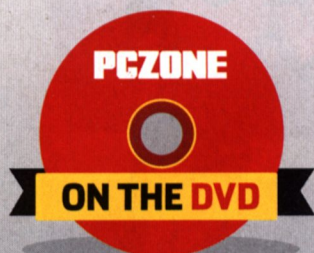
*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



248
HOURS*

Demos

Jon Blyth rounds up the free stuff on our free DVD



Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008

The only football game backed by **Richard Dawkins** www.konami-pes2008.com

ANYONE WHO'S SEEN the video of Sefton playing PES will know that it inspires the ire in the gobby Yorkshireman in all of us. (Just type 'youtube, sefton, pro, and evo' into Google). I'm a more introspective gamer, which means I play by putting my tongue on my top lip, and cocking my head in the direction I want the ball to go. Jamie thinks the computer can hear him, I play like a simpleton with a Wii Remote stapled to his ear: it's just not a game that brings out the dignified aristocrat in anyone.

This demo lets you play six of the big teams in Exhibition mode. You won't see the mysteriously adapting Teamvision AI in action, but you'll be able to do a few passes, concede a few goals, and get ticked off by an irritatingly vigilant referee. And if you think things aren't going your way, you can always just scream at your monitor like a massive, Northern baby.



KICKING OFF

No-one says "I hope nothing kicks off" in PES - that's because "kicking off" means to start a game of football! It also means to have a big fight, which everyone likes too. Including pro footballers.



BACK OF THE NET, KING COLE

Andy Cole, that is! Using advanced puns like this one, I'm bound to be a hit on the terraces, if I can get everyone to shut up while I explain how clever I am.



FOOTY FOOTY FOOTY Ball Ball Ball



PENALTY

Penalty is short for "penultimate". That is because you get a yellow card before a red card, which is the ultimate card, which means it is the best. Five red cards is a good result.



GUESS GO ON GUESS

Here we see two players playing "guess how many fingers I'm holding up". Traditionally, holding up no fingers at all was considered cheating, but these cheater-friendly days, anything goes.

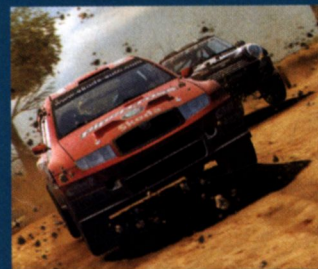


SEGA RALLY

Kick up some skids with Sega's latest

rally.sega-europe.com/en

AFTER AN INSTALLATION process that forces you to type in a company name – seriously guys, if you haven't got a company you've no place playing this kind of game – Sega have kindly given us one VW car to play on one track, and made it an advert for the German magazine, *Auto Bild*.



It's a great game, and this is a delicious little taster of what it has to offer, but you will come away from it a little hungry for more (which is the point, I suppose), and you'll also have an indistinct desire to read foreign mags.

Getting thoroughly dirty

Hard left, mud flaps akimbo



UP TO WIN

This lap was completed by simply holding down the letter "A". You'll come in last, but it's a great way to play a game while you try to complete your tax returns.



LONG EASY RIGHT

The voice that guides you around the track is pure Sega. In fact, it's probably the same guy who says "Get Ready!" on *Super Monkey Ball*. Must be cool, being that guy.

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

www.codemasters.com/jericho

A Nightmarish Barkerian Vision of Etcetera

OH, CLIVE! YOU and your dreamlike otherworlds, with relentless overtones of sadomasochism and Apocalypse. Ten minutes of cuddle therapy and you'd be writing fast-talking romcoms, not fixating on all this god-muck and decay. In this espresso-short demo, you'll get to watch

an unbearably over-vocalled movie, and play with telekinetic sniping, the healing preacher, and the jumpy cutty woman.

I feel at this stage I should say that I love Clive Barker's books – they're just easier to take this piss out of than anything else.



1 If you get stuck in the demo, follow the instructions. Chances are you need to switch to Billie, the self-harming witch who can climb walls.

2 This is the sniper rifle. Being telekinetic, you can also control the bullets a bit. This is one of the funnier parts of the demo.

3 Several clues point to the fact that this man is evil. I want you to break off into groups and come up with two clues each.

4 Oh hi, I just killed you. So please don't bother getting up.

Blood, fire, demons

It's no Pippa Funnell



SIMPLE SIMON

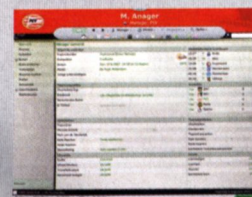
Hurray! It's an interactive button-matching cutscene. If you don't get this right, you'll get your head chopped off until you do.



INDOORSY

This Fire Ward deters enemies by igniting them. Way more effective than the Anita Ward, which rings bells at the undead until they dance.

THE BEST OF THE REST



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008

It's a brilliant game – better than *Jericho* – but it's a bastard to get interesting screenshots from, so it's relegated to top place over here. The inner beauty of the menu-driven beast is best experienced live. fm08.footballmanager.net



THRILLVILLE: OFF THE RAILS

This game is as close as you'll get to becoming a tycoon of rollercoasting without buying the game with that sentence's key words in its title. www.lucasarts.com/games/thrillville



AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE ASIAN DYNASTIES

But do they mean UK Indian Asian, or US Japanese Asian? Turns out it's both, adding the civilisations of China, Japan and India into the mix. Way to sidestep cultural differences. www.ageofempires3.com



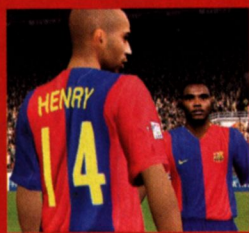
STRANGLEHOLD

What with all this football, rollercoasters and history, I'd almost forgotten what gaming is about – mindless, above-mediocre violence using special effects to dull the sense of repetition. Hurray for *Stranglehold*! www.strangleholdgame.com



FIFA MANAGER 08

www.gamershell.com/download_21278.shtml



Have we literally ripped off our arms in tribute to the football god this month? Of course not; the football god requires arms for throw-ins. Such an act would infuriate him. As would ripping off our legs in tribute. Obviously.

ESCAPE FROM PARADISE CITY

www.gamershell.com/news/42244.html



It's the sequel to the RTS/RPG *Ganglands*. You may not have heard of it, but it's free, so why not see if you like it? You might. You might not. I'm not you, so how would I know? Stop looking at me like that. Please.

SNIPPETS



PORTAL THE FLASH VERSION

www.armorgames.com/games/portaltheflashversion_game.html
If you're one of the six people who haven't spent the happiest evening of their life enjoying GLaDOS's hospitality in *Portal*, then you can make do with this 2D Flash version. Most of the tricks you'll use in the game are there. It's no replacement, but it's a lovely side dish.



OPERATION: PEDOPRIEST

www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/385299
Houses full of children and priests – it's a textbook recipe for sex crimes. In *operation: pedopriest*, it's your job to threaten witnesses before they report the crime, leaving the priests free to carry on their evil deeds. You almost want it to be a good game, but behind the shock-wow, it's predictably tedious. Bah.

THE TRUE HORN COMETH



www.elderscrolls.com

Fighter's Stronghold concludes free *Oblivion* content



THE LAST EXTRA bit of content for *Oblivion* is available to download. It's free for a limited time, before being sold at a 'cheap' price. *The Fighter's Stronghold* gives you, a legendary warrior, the kind of castle you deserve, stuffed with upgradeable furniture and Knights of the True Horn to do your bidding, no matter how whimsical.

It turns out that you've inherited Battlehorn Castle from some Knight's quirky will. It opens up a few new collectibles – a posh forge and a vintner whose wines produce combat buffs, for starters.

This is ideal for people who think *The Sims* is a bit feminine and want to play dolls houses with the Medieval

equivalent of the Millennium Falcon, with overtones of *Brewster's Millions*.

You can even hire a taxidermist to pad out your castle with the corpses of your conquests, although whether he'll embalm the vampire prostitutes from the original for your private pleasure is yet to be confirmed.

Minxes.

BLOOD FROM A STONE

www.playredstone.com

Another Korean free-to-play MMO? Meet *Red Stone*

ANOTHER MONTH, ANOTHER different font for the numbers coming out of the monster's heads. The font for the numbers coming out of the monster's heads in *Red Stone* is a rough and abrasive font, slightly ornate in its stylings, but with little anti-aliasing to help it blend in with the surroundings. As you strike the monster, the number swells slightly immediately upon leaving the monster's head, before shrinking to around 60 per cent of its maximum size and rising vertically upwards for what must be, in the game world, around the height of a princess.

Fonts aside, *Red Stone* is another MMO with Korean art-stylings, but like

Dofus, most of the decent artwork has been put into the menu system. There's a transformation system that seems a little inspired by the 'stances' of *Sword of the New World* – another game you've probably never played, thanks to a perfectly natural indifference that we'd be insane not to acknowledge – and there's a critical point system that's pretty much like *WOW's* rage.

There are redeeming features: the Princess is a great character class and she hoists up her dress while she runs – but this is mainly for people who want to try something new without putting any thought into what that new thing might be.

Latest model of toilet roll holders.



THE MIDDLETON MYSTERY

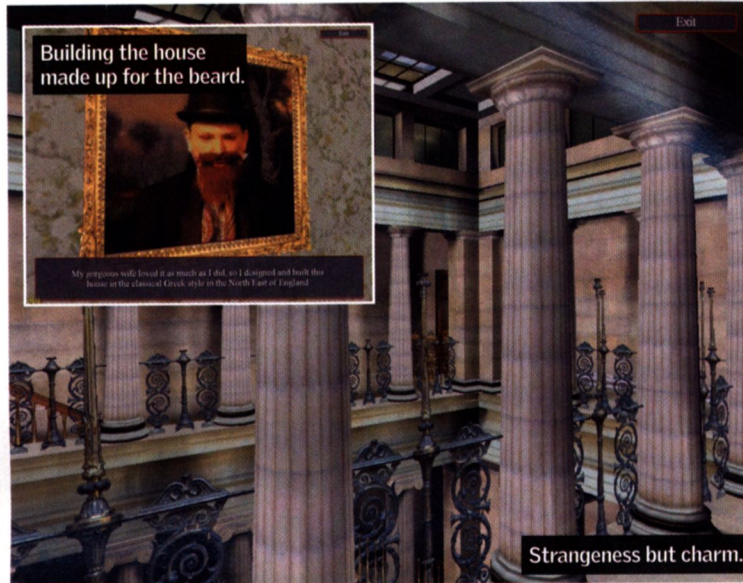
Jon Blyth gets high marks in a puzzle game by kids

www.picturehousebelsay.co.uk/middletonmystery

SOME MONTHS AGO, we told you about *The Middleton Mystery*, a game backed by English Heritage and designed by the children of Ashington Community High School. It was conceived to encourage younger visitors to attend Belsay Hall; and when the website says "adults will love the Jacobean ruins, while children are welcome to play outside," you can see why some good PR with the young wouldn't go amiss. Heading it up is Steve Manthorp, who's previously organised an *Unreal* map set in Cartwright Hall – "a wonderful place for a massacre".

Caveats out of the way, first. This isn't a high-budget triple-A title, and it would be the basis of a frustrating *Monty Python* sketch if anyone suggested it was. The enjoyment that comes from playing *The Middleton Mystery* is that you're not playing against the brains of seasoned developers – you're just seeing what happens. That certain lack of polish, the quirky-but-works control method and the voice acting all add to the charm, simply because you're not sure what to expect.

In that sense, playing *The Middleton Mystery* reminded me of learning those now-weary gaming conventions myself. I remembered the time I'd spend trying to jump over a fence, unable to accept that I

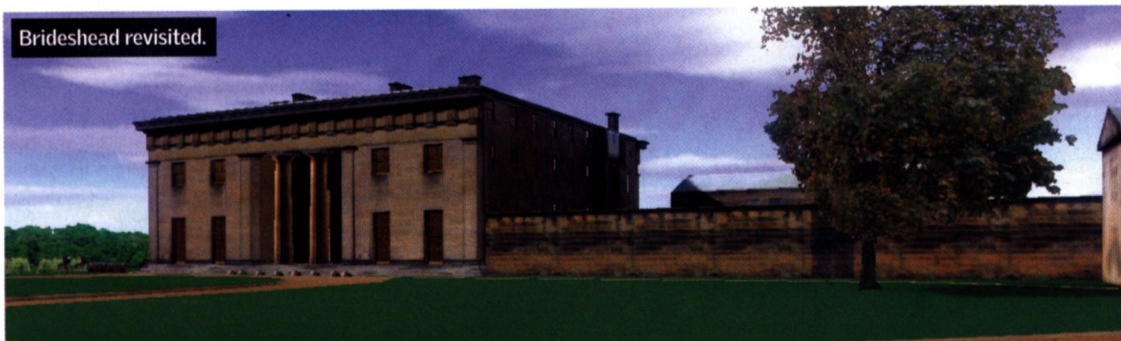


was just meant to treat it like a massive brick wall. It turns out *The Middleton Mystery* doesn't really undo your sense of gaming stability – which was a little hopeful. I'll be honest – it's just a bunch of puzzles to make the old Hall seem all mysterious.

The team of kids who helped develop it range from the complete non-gamer to the seasoned PlayStation addict, and what they've come up with is interesting

in terms of history, gaming and what National Heritage are trying to do. It's definitely more *Myst* than *Sam & Max*, but with the intricate puzzles of *Myst* replaced with keys under doormats. The kids involved have every right to be proud of themselves, and in the future, when games finally replace rock 'n' roll, this might well be their equivalent of *The League of Gentlemen's Creme Brûlée*. The demo will be on next month's DVD.

Brideshead revisited.



Movie of the month A VAMPIRE STORY

LucasArts may have left the genre for dead, but people simply won't stop coming around and reviving it. It's gotten to the point where the genre *has* actually revived, and people are still administering electric shocks while it tries to go shopping and have a drink. Which must be pretty annoying for any kind of genre.



Photographics of ghosts are rare as they live in the dark and the flash bulb kills them.



This is a gargoyle. Gargoyles are actually meant to ward off evil, but nobody cares about that.



It's all terrifying enough to drive a woman into embracing a horse. A sweet, warm, erotic horse.



Hurray for the classic 'Pompous and Stupid' double act! This might actually be quite good.

SNIPPETS



JENKA'S NIGHTMARE UPDATED

indygamer.blogspot.com/2007/11/jenkas-nightmare.html
You love *Cave Story*, right? Sure you do – it had Evil Edna in it. *Jenka's Nightmare* is an in-progress mod that substantially extends the gameplay and the storyline. Only play if you've finished CS with the best ending (unlikely) or don't mind spoilers.



STARQUAKE REMAKE

members.home.nl/evert29/starquake.zip
Every one of us must carry 200 games in their passive gaming vocabulary. Games that we know, but will only ever think of once they stumble across them on the internet. *Starquake* must be in thousands of people's passive vocabularies, and I refuse to play it again in case it's shit.

VAGUEST

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH CALL OF JUAREZ ENHANCEMENT PACK



"Alters the game substantially, introducing various changes, including gameplay modifications."



Freeware



Steve Hogarty baths in five pound notes, and showers in pennies

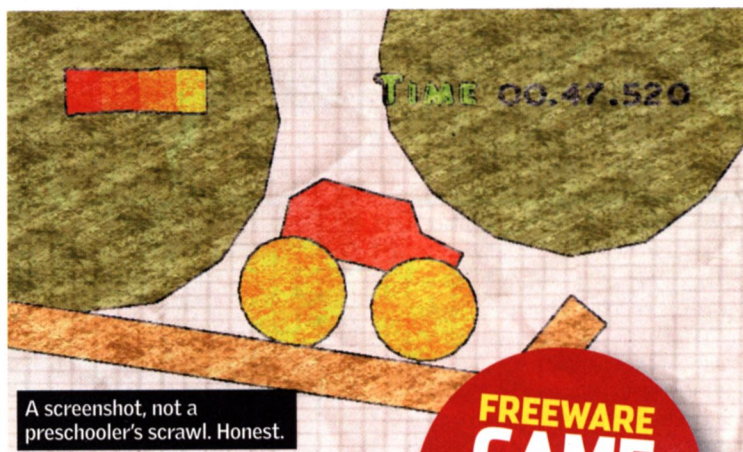
This month, wibble wobble your way through jelly land, walk up walls without splatting, guide a dumb, hallucinating and senile bear back to his house, and protect a very important person made of about seven polygons from villains made of even fewer.

JELLOCAR Yeah what's wrong with it today?

Dev: walaber | walaber.blogspot.com

IMAGINE, RIGHT, IF cars were made of jelly. And instead of, like, roads, they drove on this sort of jelly substance. You could call it, JellyMobile. Or, if you simply love bastardising our language and randomly garbling words the Queen spent ages inventing, you could call it *JelloCar*. It's an amazingly fun, vibrant and colourful physics-based platform puzzler, in which you must avoid falling off the level or breaking your car as you attempt to reach the goal.

Your car and various parts of the level are what's known as soft-body physics objects – that is, they bend, wobble, expand, contract, and generally act like jelly on a plate. It all, for no apparent reason, takes place in a *Roobarb and Custard*-style sketch land backed by crumbled graph paper. Alongside this, every sound is mouthed using what we can only guess is the creator's mouth. As you accelerate, the car makes childish wobbling noises, as you bounce, it makes



A screenshot, not a preschooler's scrawl. Honest.

ridiculous, improvised bouncing sounds. It's silly, but it's great, and it compliments the mad on-screen action.

Levels begin quite simply with jaunts across basic, solid levels, before graduating into complex, wobbling constructs. One has you balancing on a ball, gently reversing to roll the ball forwards like some jellified circus act. The physics engine handles it all with quivering aplomb, and glitchy moments are rare. That said, it seems to crash frequently under *Vista*, but only sometimes, and then only at the end of a level. It manages to save your time though, so it's just a minor annoyance.

Oh, it's at a beta stage too. So we forgive the crashes, especially as once it reaches completion it's going to set sail for Xbox LIVE Arcade and probably become something you'll have to pay for, instead of grabbing for free.

We only hope that in the time between us writing this review and you reading it, *JelloCar* doesn't stop being freeware. That would make us liars. Dirty time-liars.

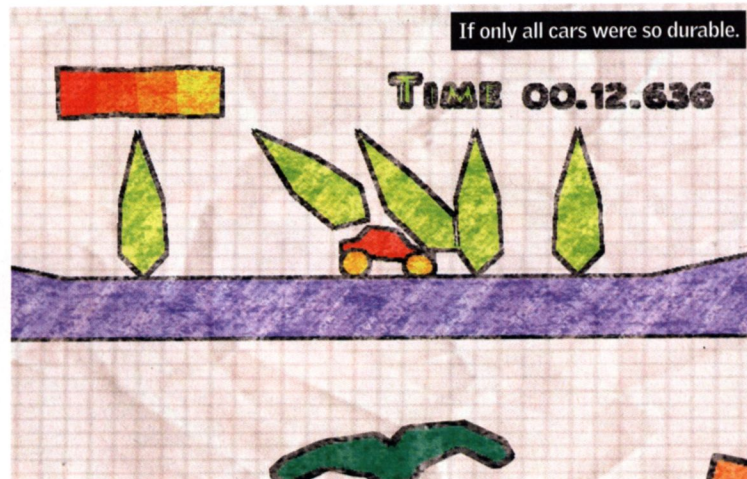
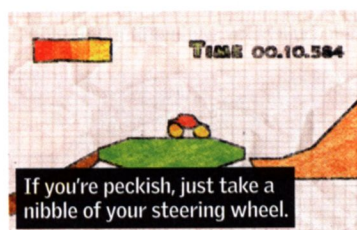
Ignore physics at your peril.

MANIFOLD Fall into a wall

Dev: Joel Esler | www.kongregate.com/games/joelesler/manifold

GRAVITY. WITHOUT IT we'd have evolved into spongy flesh-spheres long ago. With it, we've grown legs to keep us aloft, and arms to swing from tree branches. But gravity isn't always our faithful, downward-pulling friend, sometimes it is a harsh mistress, cruelly limiting our ability to jump over obstacles, and scale sheer cliffs using nothing but our toes.

In these circumstances, you'd need to fire local gravity-warping anomalies at walls before jumping into them. Inside these anomalies, gravity flows in a direction of your choosing: slap a bit of sideways gravity on a vertical surface, and you can walk up it, *Prey*-style. *Manifold* might be very short, but it's an interesting, if fiddly idea, and one we'd love to see expanded into a lengthy platform adventure game.



BEAR GO HOME What's this then? "Ursis eunt domus"?

Dev: Phoenix Seed | www.daretothedigital.com/showcase

I LOVE HOW *Bear Go Home* looks, because it looks like *Loco Roco*, that wonderfully charming PSP title in which you tilt the world to guide a cute yellow blob to his destination. I'm also certain that the creator of *Bear Go Home* is a fan of *Loco Roco* too, as its influence is clear throughout. Something they haven't quite managed to mimic however is *Loco Roco*'s magical

soundtrack – those catchy, harmonic, original tunes earnestly sung by Japanese schoolchildren.

Instead, *Bear Go Home* has an irritatingly short loop of infuriatingly senseless nursery rhyme, sung by some generic kids. It's missed the cutesy mark, and overshot into the pissing me off mark, which is a shame, because the rest of the game is quite well designed outside of a few glitches.

The bear walks autonomously towards his goal, and you must pull his tail to make him jump over gaps, smack some snails to clear his path, and pull open his jaw to make him eat. It's like having to look after a hairy, elderly relative suffering from some form of dementia, except you've got to pay a bit more attention.



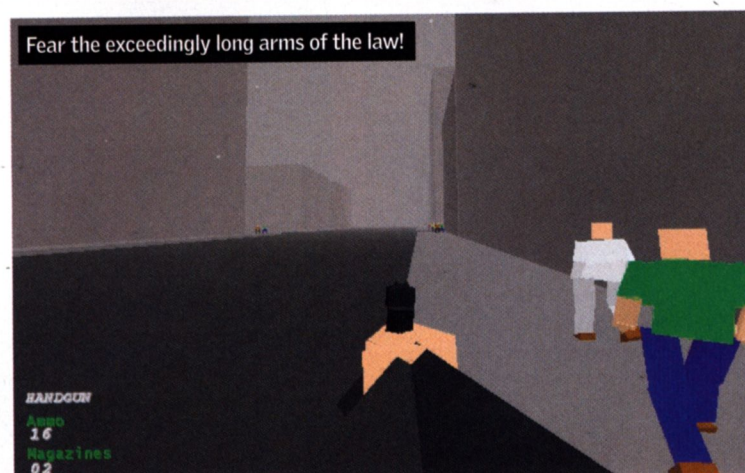
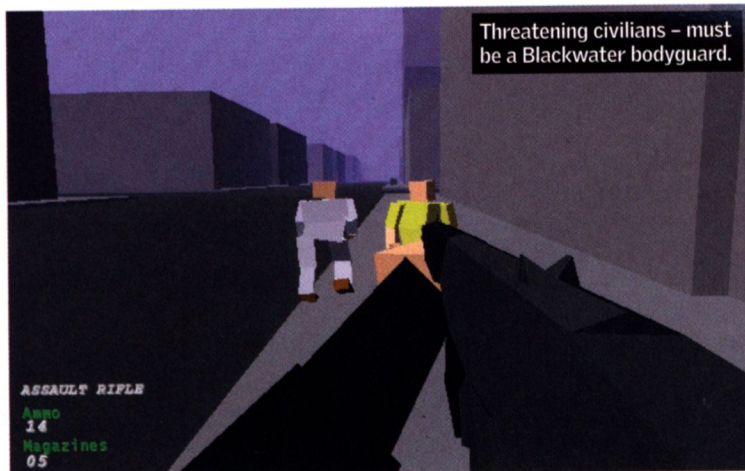
BLACK SHADES And I will always love yooooO0000UUUU

Dev: Wolfire | wolfire.com/blackshades.html

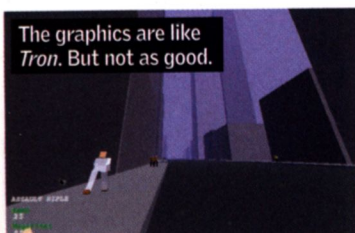
THIS IS A brilliant game, even though it might look like the polygonal equivalent of a dog's jagged, pixelated anus. You're a bodyguard, and you've got to protect your client as he walks down a busy city street. Random assassins burst from the crowd, brandishing guns and knives, and you've got to act fast to neutralise the threat.

Gunmen take a little time between aiming and taking the shot, during which you can see their line of sight – it's enough of an opportunity to be able to slow down time and leap in front of the bullet while screaming "noooooooo!", just like Kevin Costner did in that film with the second-most annoying theme tune ever recorded.

That's not an exaggeration either, you can actually do that. You can also wrestle the gun from their hands, and then shoot them with their own weapon. Knife-wielding maniacs are harder to spot, while later you must protect your VIP from a horde of hungry zombies. *Black Shades* is difficult, but immense fun.



The graphics are like *Tron*. But not as good.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH SUPER LETTER GAME



www.lawriecape.co.uk/lettergame

OH NO, PROFESSOR Alphabetstein has dropped all the letters of the alphabet into the void of infinite space, and he's also overturned a barrel of zeds. What a mess he's made! Somebody will have to pick up each letter of the alphabet, avoiding picking up the letter Z more than once. It won't be easy, as the void of infinite space is difficult to navigate – move the mouse cursor off the centre of the field, and the whole mess of letters slides across the screen. Some are big, some are small, all are red, and most are the letter Z, and the letter N is really hard to find because that's just a Z on its side.

Oh no, the Professor is back, and he's dragging his dead wife! Gods, what have you done?

FREEPLAYPLAY!

Vendetta: Enemy sharpshooter spotted!
Log: Powder... here!
TehhaxXor: Thank ye, mate
en: Enemy sharpshooter spotted!

DMGitsTehhaxXor

[90m]

illed ZoD-mod

Undead skeletons – still obese compared with your average model.

Play: **MOD**



BATTLEFIELD PIRATES 2

Pirates, check. Zombies, check. But where's my sassy robot?



www.bfpirates.com | Mod for: Battlefield 2

THE FIRST PIRATES mod for *Battlefield 1942* was such a success that they've gone and done another, this time for *Battlefield 2*. And once again it's Undead vs Peglegs.

This concept isn't just daft for the sake of it – having such visually distinct sides makes friendly fire, and the split-second paralysis that comes from fear of friendly fire, much less of a problem. Each side has five classes, kitted out with an array of old-time weapon such as the Musketoon and tools such as the spyglass, which is perfect for pacifist snipers, but otherwise a bit useless.

As usual with *BF2*, it's an unfriendly installation process – if you've uninstalled

the bloody game, you'll have to patch up to v1.41 and then tweak with the command line switches to activate the mod – and the help file isn't in the download, it's on the website, so look there. Also, remember to Run As Administrator if you're using *Vista* otherwise you'll get kicked by *PunkBuster*.

Once you make it in, you'll begin to see why the *Pirates* mod is so well-loved in the community. It takes the feel of *BF2* and adds a whimsical theme, but keeps the fundamental gameplay that makes it all work. It's a balance that's well met, and there's nothing quite like watching a bunch of skeletons pegging it over a hill to be the first to get into a boat.

Sadly you don't get to shoot Captain Jack.



The perfect pirate home: a heavily armed lighthouse!



"I'm being stealthy, but it's hard when your joints go clackity-clack!"

FREEPLAYPLAY!

THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN



Beyond The Sword picked up jan.vandercrabben.name/tam/ | Mod for: Civ 4

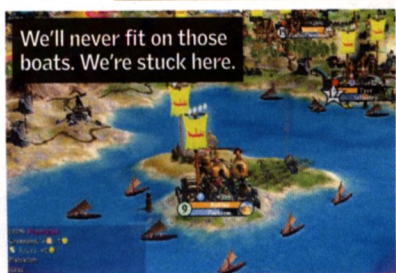
Play: MOD



IF YOU'RE NOT overly fond of the nuclear end-games of *Civ 4*, and you're not convinced by the space age elements of the *Beyond The Sword* expansion, then perhaps you'd like to bury yourself in the oft-neglected history of the Mediterranean areas? Of course, we're not suggesting that *Civ*'s the best way to learn history, but it's a damn good way to learn a few decent bluff words like 'Scythian', 'Lydian' and 'horse'.

Unlike some of the more left-field mods in *Beyond the Sword*, *TAM* plays more like a traditional game of *Civ* – the main changes are in the tech tree (which now peaks at a health boosting 'Sanitation'), new units and revised wonders. Three contemporary tribes have been introduced, and you might end up reading more about the nomadic, horseback Iranians who are the origins of the phrase 'Parthian Shot'.

Now excuse me while I go and have sex with a book.



RED ALERT: A PATH BEYOND

The Renegade of this atomic age...

www.apathbeyond.com | Mod for: C&C Renegade

COMMAND & CONQUER: *Renegade* was duff to say the least – but the appeal was absolutely astronomic. A *Battlefield*-style FPS set in the *C&C* universe? With Mammoth tanks, hands of nod and the full gamut of iconic Westwood imagineering? What a pure bloody crime that it was such a miserable experience to play.

Some though loved the concept – and

a standalone multiplayer version dealing with the *Red Alert* Universe (in beta at the time of writing) has been accordingly risen from the ashes. Its meld of RTS and FPS may be not be of a *Savage* standard (remember *Savage*?), but it seems far more cogent than *Renegade*'s multiplayer variant and lets you fulfil the adolescent fantasy of actual being *Tanya*.

Clearly the graphics are dated now, but with rumours spilling out of EA that another stab at the *C&C* FPS may be in the offing (and wouldn't it be nice if DICE were at the helm?) now is a great time re-immersion yourself.



Play: MOD



Believe it or not, some gamers actually liked *Renegade*.



Sniper rifle vs tank: a bit silly.



"TWO cannons?
That's just unfair!"





Online Zone

www.pczone.co.uk



Can't wait for the next **PC ZONE**? Don't panic! Just hit **www.pczone.co.uk** now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the **PC ZONE** blog!



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Three months later, you're still talking about games boxes

"Anyone remember when games packaging was nice cardboard boxes and large well printed instruction books? I miss the old days - these new DVD-case packs are ugly as shite."

Jonny_p66

"I don't really read manuals unless they're for a very complex game. I just sniff them. That lamination-glue aroma will forever be associated with the excitement of getting a brand new game."

Reverend_Joseph

"I've got the White Label release of the *Fallout* collection - the PDF manuals look great but are completely useless while playing unless you've got a spare PC to view them on."

g_hughes

"I have to agree, I prefer the bigger boxes. I recently bought a game off eBay. The disc and manual only arrived... I was devastated."

Jase

"I'm a complete dickhead."

jonny_p66

"The large ones were a waste of space, in fairness. The DVD boxes do at least mean I have a chance at being able to store my games collection."

psychoseal

"I think games should come on self-contained packages of unrewritable solid-state memory with their own custom hardware to make the AI discuss random things from the internet."

jonny_p66



Forumites reminisce over cardboard boxes.

ON THE BLOG

What's been happening on **ZONE's** web diary this month...



IT'S BEEN A cheeky month on the **ZONE** blog, with Steve and Log posting a "too hot for print" *Argue The Toss*. Based on a proposed 1.5-page advert, our response was to use the remaining half-page to argue the benefits of stupid-sized adverts. Sadly, the advert was pulled, leaving nowhere but the internet for our now-redundant lampoonery.

Meanwhile, Log's failure to win an award led him to drink way too much wine and grab the winner's award and stuff it down his trousers. The winner may write for a rival mag, but even that doesn't mean he deserves a big bearded ginger grabbing his possessions and stuffing them somewhere needlessly genital. If it's any consolation, Log went on to tumble down some stairs and is now picking the scabs off his badly grazed knee.

PC ZONE: we may not win awards, but we certainly have the most awards down our trouser compared to any of our competitors (or rather, competitor).



Round 4 now available on the **ZONE** website and iTunes!

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

WIN!

Send us your MMO character screenshots to win stuff...

You already know all about our 'PC ZONE Around The World' bit in Letters, where we ask you to send in your photos of yourself holding your favourite mag all over the globe. Well now, you're cordially invited to send us screenshots of you or your clan in your favourite MMO with a brief, jolly explanation of what you're up to. The best two postcards sent to us every month at **letters@pczone.co.uk** will be printed here and win a PC game. Get snapping...

FIGHT CLUB

Suddenly we're the cool kids...

COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!



WE HAVE NEVER known such popularity. Never has a Fight Club spilt so merrily into overflow servers: with everyone joining Log and Steve on the mix-map Dustbowl and Will and a few of his cronies on 2fort feeling very much like they were on the kids' table.

A fantastic time was had though – with Log being dominated by someone called Leelo and then getting some sweet revenge, Suze and Sefton being an

unstoppable Medic/Heavy team (that was, in fairness, all-too-frequently stopped) and Will attempting to be an engineer and putting his turrets in ALL of the wrong places.

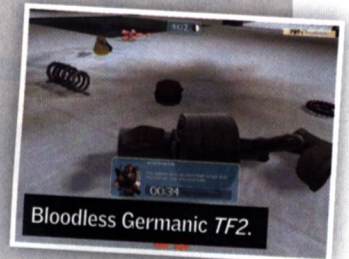
The next *Team Fortress 2* Fight Club will be at 6pm on Thursday 8 November at 6pm – keep an eye on the forums, the blog and the *PC ZONE* Steam community group (steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz) for updates...

ZONE CHAT



Yet now we're a clique...

THIS MONTH'S CHAT was conducted simultaneously after Steve's discovery that if you changed the language options in Portal then



GLaDOS can speak in German – what's more, she sounds a little sexy. This led our happy band of men, a small crowd compared with last month's throng, to discuss the fact that the German version of *TF2* has no blood whatsoever, and instead of gibbs has rubber ducks, clocks, cogs and springs spinning out of people's bodies.

What's more, a massive two free games were won – after Zhou|TWL guiltily admitted he already had *World in Conflict*, and bsoltan gallantly stepped forward to Hoover up his prize. Next ZONE Chat is at 5:30pm on Wednesday 7 November. Until then, keep watching the skies...

How to join in!

If you fancy joining the *ZONE* Chat, you need an IRC program and an internet connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install, set the options, devise an online identity, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy fighting fires in Greece armed with a special hose – then join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers. Who knows – some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at www.pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

- COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
- HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
- PREY**
prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719
- BATTLEFIELD 2142**
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
- TEAM FORTRESS 2**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135

Holiday greetings!



"This is a snap of my character Aragos (on the Evernight *LOTRO* server) at a celebrity bash for the forging of some famous sword or other. No free food or drink, alas."

Aragos
(Martin Smith)

Wish You Were Here!



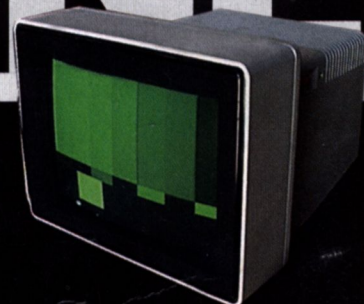
"Here's a pic of my first *WoW* character. It's a crap one, taken due to a weak pathological need to show off those 'omfgepixx LOL giefplzkkthxbai', as the locals like to say."

Uber Pete
(Dave "SunScramble"
Buckland)

Retro ZONE

Jon Blyth travels back in time to indulge in some fingering

THE JOYS OF TEXT



EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH

BUT HOW?

It's really, really, easy to play *Colossal Cave Adventure*. Too easy to warrant a column this size, in honesty. But a column this size is what we have, and if I have to fill it with needless words, so be it.

I've never claimed to be above a bit of frivolous word-floss, and I could probably write 2,000 words before feeling forced to actually say anything.

That said, anyone reading this might have the ever-growing sensation of wading through treacle in loose Wellingtons, so to avoid any claustrophobic reactions to this column, I guess I'll just give you the link you need.

Links...

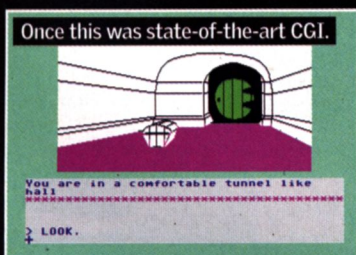
1 Wesley Holland
www.wesleyholland.com/misc/adventure/adventure.html
Go there. Play.
OK cool. Thanks.

WHEN WILLIAM CROWTHER decided to combine his passions of role-playing, pot-holing and computer programming he started a whole genre. *Colossal Cave Adventure* was the first adventure game, set in a cave where "magic is said to work". If magic is a bird that's scared of rods and the word XYZZY, then those rumours are right.

The pioneering effort that went into the game and the depth of gameplay available was remarkable. Considering this was two years before *Space Invaders* introduced the world to addiction through hypnotic sounds and frantic repetition, *Colossal Cave Adventure* involved guessing at the game's vocabulary, remembering a large and twisting maze – or mapping it with a pen and paper, if you were a big spud.

It still had that canny gaming edge, though. Like the Sierra games that followed it, you could finish the game with a less than perfect score, which would cause any self-respecting obsessive to make an audible harrumph sound before starting again with his tongue on his upper lip.

Most importantly of all, *Colossal Cave Adventure* captured the imagination of other programmers. One of the game's spells was used as a cheat in early versions of *Minesweeper* – which is about as interesting as trivia gets – but



```
PAUSE INTT DONE statement executed
to resume execution, type go. Other input will terminate the job.
go
execution resumes after PAUSE.
WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!! WOULD YOU LIKE INSTRUCTIONS?
```

```
SOMEWHERE NEARBY IS COLOSSAL CAVE, WHERE OTHERS HAVE FOUND
FORTUNES IN TREASURE AND GOLD. THOUGH IT IS RUMORED
THAT SOME WHO ENTER ARE NEVER SEEN AGAIN, MAGIC IS SAID
TO WORK IN THE CAVE. I WILL BE YOUR EYES AND HANDS. DIRECT
ME WITH COMMANDS OF 1 OR 2 WORDS.
(ERRORS, SUGGESTIONS, COMPLAINTS TO CROWTHER)
(IF STUCK TYPE HELP FOR SOME HINTS)
```

```
YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END OF A ROAD BEFORE A SMALL BRICK
BUILDING. AROUND YOU IS A FOREST. A SMALL
STREAM FLOWS OUT OF THE BUILDING AND DOWN A GULLY.
```

Text-only adventures – it's a curiously pure, uniquely retro and very often annoying genre

it also inspired Scott Adams to form Adventure International and directly inspired the creators of *Zork*. Text-only adventures had a very brief golden era – the minute computers could handle it,

people started chucking graphics at them. But it's a curiously pure, uniquely retro and very often annoying genre that'll always have some tits like me playing pocket billiards over them.

FACT FILE

Some stuff you may already know, but may not

WILLIAM CROWTHER
Will started making his game after divorcing his wife. Like we always say – relationships just get in the way.

ELIZA
Text parsing was, and is, a massive challenge – ELIZA, a spoof AI psychologist, was an inspiration for Crowther.

GOOD GRAPHICS
Woo, nice house. Who lives there? Nobody knows. It's the Mystery House. Perhaps it is a ghost or a zombie.

ARPANET
Not only did Crowther enjoy throwing axes at dwarves, he also worked on ARPANET, the daddy of the internet.

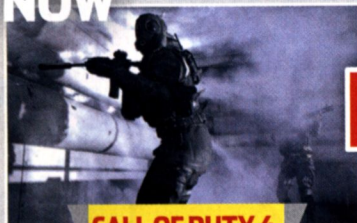
SCOTT ADAMS
Scott Adams wrote some of his games with his wife. Like we always say – love is a many-splendoured thing.

NOW AND THEN
Nowadays it's all hendecagonal frying pans. Text is relegated to mobile phones and deaf people.

NOW & THEN

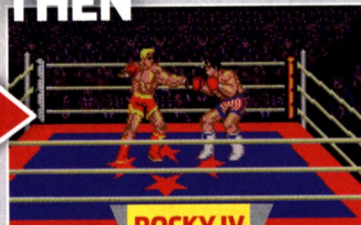
Russians: will they ever stop being so bloody evil?

NOW



CALL OF DUTY 4

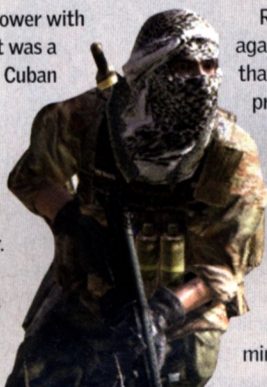
THEN



ROCKY IV

IN THE COLD WAR, we had a superpower with missiles pointed at every major city. It was a pretty terrifying time to live, with the Cuban Missile Crisis, four-minute warnings and the vague idea that if a nuclear bomb landed outside your house, you should throw mattresses at it.

That's proper government-sponsored, megaton-warhead terror. No wonder Hollywood made a film about Sylvester Stallone punching a Russian – he might as well have been punching a missile into space.



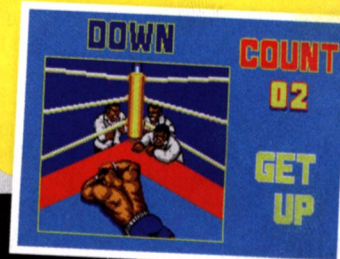
Russians are the bad guys in games again – *World In Conflict* and *Call of Duty 4*: that's enough to establish a trend, isn't it? – probably because everyone's so embarrassed about that Iraq thing and the fact they're white makes it seem a bit less racist.

The fact remains that the Russians are evil again, and I for one am keeping an eye on the DEFCON level, one eye on the sky for Ruskie parachutes, and making sure I'm never more than four minutes away from that mattress.

PLAY IT!

The 1987 *Rocky* game was released on the Sega Master System, so you should probably think about emulating that.

- 1 www.emulator-zone.com/doc.php/sms is where you'll find *Fusion*, the best emulator for Sega. It even emulates other Sega consoles.
- 2 Google hints this month include "Sega Master System ROMs" and "Rocky". The file you may want is 122.47Kb in size.
- 3 You'll have to fight Mr T before you get to punching Russians. Does this Rocky guy punch any Italians? Racist.
- 4 Oh yeah, you're a pirate now. Hah! You might have accidentally led yourself into the criminal underclass. Go and smoke some B&H, you stinking crim.



MAME FRAME CHACK'N POP

Developer: Taito | Year: 1983

CHACK'N POP ISN'T much fun. But that's not why we're here, is it? This isn't about fun, it's about education, edification and hoisting up our petticoats to paddle in a past-puddle.

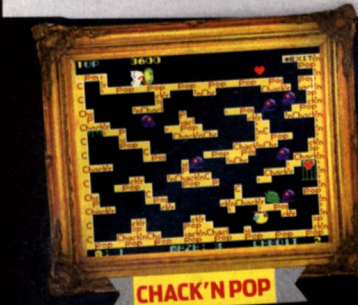
In *Chack'N Pop*, a bunch of purple Belugas have stolen some of the love hearts that came out of your head while you were making out with your girlfriend.

Miss Chack'N is hysterical and tells you to get them back. Because you're too spineless to say, "look, hearts are just a symbol of love. You can't steal love. It can, however, be corroded by years of unreasonable demands," you're forced into some lethal caverns which will, eventually, kill you. Thanks, love.

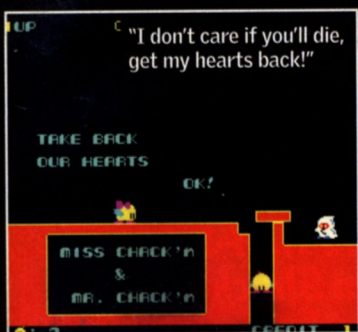
Chack'N Pop – once you realise that the two buttons make you drop a bomb to different sides – is actually a pretty cool game for the time.

You'll occasionally kill yourself *Bomberman*-style, but you can walk on ceilings, so it's swings and roundabouts really. But the coolest thing about this '80s bad boy, if you didn't already know, is that it's the prequel to the classic *Bubble Bobble*.

Recognise the flobber-chopped Belugas and the Stoner ghost? Without *Chack'N Pop*, we wouldn't have *Rainbow Islands* or that stupid *Bust-a-Move* shit that got receptionists everywhere playing *Snood*. Hail, *Chack'N Pop*!



CHACK'N POP



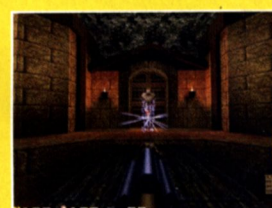
WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator*, currently emulating over 3,500 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use *Mame32* for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.



Mr Chack'N looking for love.

BACK IN THE DAY...



FIRST KILLS

By Will Porter

In olden times, when I was a nipper, the very idea of playing deathmatch was something that happened to other people.

With *Doom* and then *Duke 3D*, the possibilities of online carnage was something I could only read about in the hallowed pages of *PC ZONE* – I neither knew people with decent PCs nor did my family have any inclination to either pay for, or even acknowledge, the fledgling internet.

No, my introduction to the wonders of an online frag didn't arise until *Quake* – and even that was at a posh(er) friend's house.

My first kill? Not by bullet nor by casually sprayed lightning beam: simply by trapping someone in a room that filled with lava. The first of many beautiful virtual deaths...

SUPERTEST

THE SUPERTEST OF TIME

Sniffing the classics of yesteryear to see whether they've gone a bit off...



YOUR VIEW

Last month we were quite simply obsessed by the burning issue of gaming vintage. In what year could you find the PC's finest hour?

2K AND 2

Steve - 2002? You're the one who's trippin', bucko. Look harder at 2000 and you'll see *Diablo II*, *Baldur's Gate 2*, *Deus Ex*, *Hitman*, *Ground Control* and *Shogun: TW*. Thanks for participating. Discussion over.

Csdaveuk

FLAKE

I'm going with '99, partly because it's my favourite ice cream but mostly because of *System Shock 2*, *AoE II*, *Q3A*, *AvP*, *Homeworld*, *Planescape: Torment*, *Dungeon Keeper 2* and *Half-Life: Opposing Force*.

Reverend_Joseph

11/2 FAT LADIES

I was having this exact same conversation in the pub last Tuesday, and the '98 crowd are definitely, definitely onto something.

Sunscramble

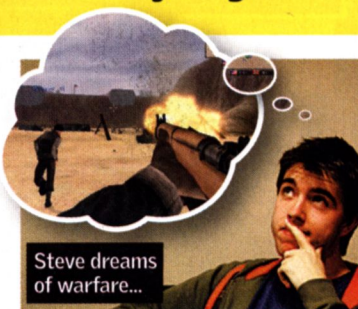
STEVE INSULT

I'm not surprised that Steve voted for 2002 though. For him that's the equivalent of the '80s for most of us. He probably can't remember anything before '99, he was still in nursery school. Wow, this contest is getting brutal.

The Tingler

PC GAMERS WEAR permanently rose-tinted spectacles. Fond remembrance of games gone past is a prerequisite for the higher brain powers that our specialist interest demands. But can you honestly play an old game and get the same level of enjoyment as you do with the new games like *Corridor Shooter 13: Vengeance*? The answer garnered by this Supertest: yes, no, perhaps and a debate the likes of which has never been known.

Prompted by a dual-pronged nostalgia attack in Will's underlying feeling of 'meh' as he played *Final Doom* and new production man Richard Cosgrove's fervent *Baldur's Gate* modding banter, this was a Supertest that genuinely covered interesting ground. Do shooters age worse than role-players? Why are *Half-Life* and *System Shock 2* still so eminently playable? Did the sudden post-LucasArts death of the point-and-click add an extra



Steve dreams of warfare...



Suzy dreams of roleplay...

halo to their games and ensure that their legacy would not be forgotten? Does the fact that PC games used to come in great big boxes but are now puny in comparison have an overall bearing on the quality of the actual games?

So, anyway, great Supertest this. And please note that soon these will not remain exclusively tied to the cover discs, but will make their presence known on iTunes on the weeks that pubcasts are not forthcoming. Would you look at how increasingly web 2.0 we are! See you there, internet pals. **PCZ**



Will dreams of leather...



Sefton is largely a blank.

Still better than *BioShock*?
The SS2 debate rages on...



Why are *Half-Life* and *System Shock 2* still so eminently playable?



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BROADBAND

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill goes bear baiting in *Guild Wars: Eye of the North*...

ALL DRESSED UP with nowhere to go. Previously on NeverQuest, I meticulously prepare myself for an epic journey into uncharted territory in search of the mysterious Eye of the North.

Thwarted at the last by my glaring lack of experience, I am bluntly told to come back when I've reached level 20. Faced with the terrifying prospect of collecting plants for a week in order to level up, I turn in desperation to the nearest *PC ZONE* reader, one Odessa Falcorn, who has been to The Eye of the North and seen things that no butch pony-tailed warrior should ever see.

"Can you write 800 words on it in a *PCZ* style?" I plead hopefully.

"I'm not sure I could," laughs Odessa. "Nice try, though. But if you can write a 10,000-word law essay, maybe we can talk."

Touché. He may not be able to help, but he has confirmed some suspicions about lawyers in so much as he lives in a fantasy world.

"Anyway, I've shoved you on my friends list," says Odessa the Lawyer. "If you want to look me up next month or whatever, give me a shout. Ciao."

Fat use. I'm stuck in a fantasy world and I can't even get a lawyer.

Faced with a mammoth slog to reach the required level 20, I set about my toil with a sense of stoic obligation, traversing Tyria a hundred times on a series of mind-numbing tasks. Night turns into day, day turns into night, yet still I grind, drawing ever closer to the Promised Land beyond the fissure in The Plains of Jarin. That's the kind of commitment I'm prepared to make for you, the loyal *PC ZONE* reader.

STAMPING FEET

And if you believe that, you'll believe anything. Magazines are as much of an illusion as any other media, and in the same way that crater-faced chef Gordon Ramsay didn't really catch those sharks on some TV show, I don't lift so much as a sequined finger. What I do is get on to some PR lackey and throw a showbiz tantrum, demanding a level 20 character, flowers, chocolates and a bowl of M&Ms – with the blue ones taken out, of course.

My wish is his demand and, within minutes, I am the recipient of a brace of high-level characters, standing dead-eyed before me, waiting for me to breath life into them. On the one hand there's Natalius Candida, a Ritualist/Assassin with a shock of ginger hair and a great big fuckoff hammer. On the other, there's the

I throw a showbiz tantrum and demand a level 20 character...



The light pours out of me.



Now that's lens flare.

svelte Natalia Candida, a near-anorexic who looks as though she could do with a pan of scouse down her neck.

HAMMER TIME

Balking at the whole cross-dressing scene, I opt to be the man and celebrate by knocking the living shit out of a Fanged Iboga with my new hammer. In my excitement, I head for the crack in the ground alone, which backfires when I'm immediately attacked by Barbary Corsairs and die an early death. Returning minutes later with a selection of generic henchmen, we're still no match for the Corsairs and take another almighty shoeing.

Appealing to other humans to come to my aid, I am greeted by a wall of indifference. There's plenty of chat but it almost exclusively involves some bell-end attempting to sell a selection of meaningless trinkets. Shunned by humanity, I turn to my trusty mute heroes, Koss and Dunkoro, and also recruit a youthful ward by the name of Acolyte Jin. A well-honed fighting unit, we mete out a well-deserved kicking to the Corsairs, with Captains, Wizards and Raiders alike all fleeing in terror.

Heading deep into the underground caverns, we bump into a dwarf called Ogden Stonehealer. We've scarcely got past the small talk when he announces that The Destroyers are here and suggests that we run like bloody fuck. It's a race against the clock, and with seconds to spare we dive through a portal and are spat into a hostile frozen world where a giant tattooed woman with huge tits tells us a story about a bear.

Heading north, we mercilessly slaughter the varied wildlife and trudge joylessly through the snow. Weakened by battle and the frozen conditions, finally a large shadow looms on the horizon. Closer inspection reveals a towering structure and in unison we gaze in awe upon The Eye of the North. It's rubbish.

"We're adventurers from the South," I announce to nobody in particular. Heading inside, we discover a Scrying Pool, something I last experienced when I spent some time as a dog with a spider sidekick in *The Lord Of The Rings Online*. Giving it a wide berth, I somehow find myself embroiled in an organised fight with a bear, who deals me an irresistible blow. It's grim up North. **PCZ**



Silly costume courtesy London Fashion Week.



Tower of power.



Attack of the slug-thing.

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Question: What's your favourite festive grub?

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The stunning new single- and multiplayer shooter from the team that created *Battlefield*. Read the exclusive verdict – only in **PC ZONE**!



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Review and demo! The return of Epic's mighty shooter – is it the best yet?



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CHRISTMAS CRACKER!
Phil Wand reviews Yuletide PC gifts, and the **PC ZONE** Christmas card is back!



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Huge feature on the highs and lows of a stellar year of PC gaming. Plus! The **PC ZONE** team pick their games of 2007



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WITH WINDY MILLER OR
WAS THAT CAMBERWICK GREEN?"

HELLGATE TRUMPTON

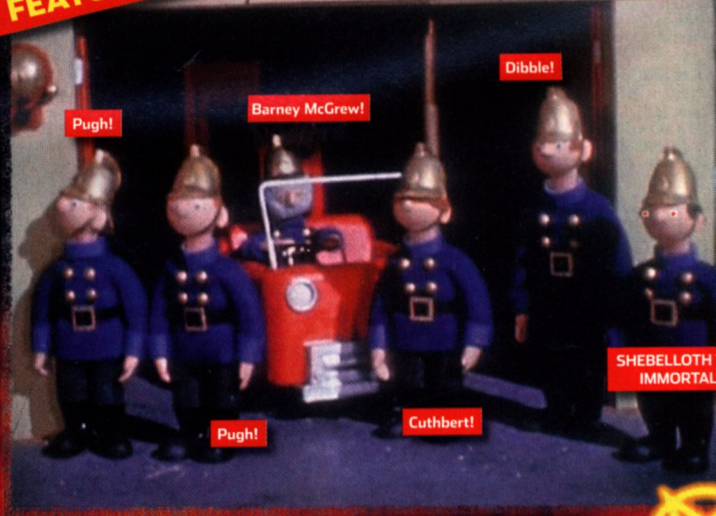
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**The flowerseller lady is speaking in a terrifying ancient language and scrawling odd symbols
on the pavement outside the town hall, can this be ended without loss of life please?**

**Those two mechanical statues on the town hall have opened a portal to the very deepest
pit of the inferno, could you bring your hoses along please?**

*As a media outlet dedicated to the preservation of the memory of Trumpton, and indeed the other hotspots of Trumptonshire, PC ZONE would like it known that if this joke is lost on you then you have never lived. Trumpton - The Complete Collection is available from all good stockists with an RRP of £13.99. It doesn't feature demons, but does have an exciting bit when a greenhouse chimney is pulled down by the emergency services so that a vegetable competition can proceed in relative safety.

COMPETITION

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- A. EAST
- B. NORTH
- C. WEST

Please send your answer **A, B or C** to **84383** with the keyword of **TIME** or email **timeshift@futurenet.co.uk**

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A hero never dies



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